

Chinese Gender and Community under British Colonialism:

A case study of An He village in the New Territories

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Declaration

This thesis has been composed entirely by the author. All work is attributable to and any errors are the responsibility of the author. None of the work contained in the thesis has been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

Signed:

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Abstract

Under British colonial rule, Hong Kong had achieved a reputation of being a modern, prosperous international metropolis. However, little is known about the impact of British colonialism on the Chinese village communities and its long term legacy. Inherent in this legacy are the contradictions of applying indirect rule through the authorisation of patriarchal Chinese traditional institutions. The purpose of this doctoral dissertation is to examine the impact of the two contradictory legacies of British rule and Chinese patriarchy upon village community order and practices in the New Territories, the largest region of Hong Kong where has currently been turned into a suburban extension of the city.

In particular, this dissertation focuses on the village of An He, in northern New Territories, Hong Kong, and looks into the rapidly changing features of local household and community lives vis-à-vis the broader social, economic and political contexts under the period of British colonisation. This dissertation scrutinizes the consequential re-vitalisation of extremely patriarchal Chinese lineage organization on the part of British colonial rule and highlights the central importance of gender in socio-political practices in the New Territories. This dissertation points out this impingement of colonial rule upon the village male and female gender roles and the multiple ways that both sexes undertake negotiations and contestations. Special attention is paid to the active agency of women, their various influential bottom-up politics and their collective actions for their own rights in the recent social history of Hong Kong.

The general argument of this dissertation is that British colonial rule by and large worked on an expedient basis. To obtain local support, their ruling practices are frequently implicated with the most patriarchal segment of Chinese society by recognizing their land interests and sharing power with them. However, neither British colonial rule nor Chinese patriarchy could totally control the village communities in the New Territories. The social order in these communities was established not solely through the adherence to an official model but rather it came about as a result of numerous local dynamics. In practice, the extent to which men could realize their patriarchal privileges and powers is fundamentally indeterminate as well. On the other hand, the magnitude to which women could exert their influences is often largely beyond the control of patriarchal rule. Above all, community frequently entails numerous remarkable human struggles and bargaining for important social changes.

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Introduction

“As British administration ends, we are, I believe, entitled to say that our own nation’s contribution here was to provide the scaffolding that enabled the people of Hong Kong to ascend. The rule of law. Clean and light-handed government. The value of free society. The beginnings of representative government and democratic accountability. This is a Chinese city, a very Chinese city with British characteristics. No dependent territory has been left more prosperous... .”

“I have no doubt that, with people here holding on to these values which they cherish, Hong Kong’s star will continue to climb. Hong Kong’s values are decent values. They are universal values. They are the values of the future in Asia as elsewhere, a future in which the happiest and the richest communities, and the most confident and the most stable too, will be those that best combine political liberty and economic freedom as we do here today.”

(Quotations from the farewell speech by the last British Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, June 30, 1997)¹

I. Research scope and subject

It was an end of British colonial power in the world and a concluding watershed of centuries old Western colonialism. On the night of 30th June 1997, the British held their farewell ceremony in their colony, Hong Kong, before they returned it to its original fatherland of China the next morning. With huge media coverage from different countries and the attendance of various important guests and general citizens amounting to over 10,000 people, the British guard of honour at the Tamar naval base in Hong Kong performed their last large-scale parade. Under the continuing heavy

monsoon downpour, the rhythmical tread of marching guards in characteristic British uniforms, the whistling of pipes and the beat of the drums all resonated through the broad harbour under the dark skies. On stage, Chris Patten, the last Governor of Hong Kong, made his final speech to Hong Kong, an extraordinary moment in which he represented the legacy of his nation at the conclusion of colonial rule in Hong Kong. Just a few hours later, the British flag was slowly lowered from the flagpole in the wind and would not fly as the standard of the rulers in the sky of Hong Kong again.²

In his final speech, however, Patten left another equally significant part of the British colonial legacy unconcluded, specifically that dealing with the largest region of Hong Kong, the New Territories. Primarily, the British colonizers in Hong Kong claimed to rule over the New Territories village communities through a policy of indirect rule, recognizing what they thought to be traditional indigenous Chinese law and order. However, in practice they also proceeded to ‘modernise’ these traditions. The interplay of these two contradictory British colonial ruling practices had overwhelming consequences for local Chinese household and community life before Hong Kong became a ‘Special Administrative Region’ under the Chinese national regime.

¹ See Ho (Ed.), 1997, pp.104-105.

² For the proceedings of the British colonial farewell ceremony of Hong Kong see the video record by Hong Kong Broadcast Consortium (1997).

This dissertation tries to account for the particular circumstances and experiences of the people of the New Territories during the British colonial era by tracing some important social histories, political incidents and ethnographic events. Specifically, I proceed to show how the Chinese village communities in the colonial New Territories changed fundamentally. I highlight how British rule actually introduced various new official institutions and practices to these communities, some of which had crucial but often unremarked gender impacts upon the lives of the Chinese people in the New Territories. I also discuss how Chinese women used their agency despite colonial and patriarchal domination, and how they struggled for their own interests in different arenas. Special attention is paid to the issue of land and land tenure under the Chinese lineage organization, its changing meaning and application in local lives and the increasing disputes over land to be found among different actors.

II. Analytical approach and key terms

Drawing on the existing literature on Chinese domestic and communal life, the thesis contributes to the ethnographic literature on village society in the New Territories. Some key terms for the analysis are ‘colonial’, ‘tradition’, and ‘patriarchy’ and I shall now set out how I am using them in the thesis.

The word ‘colonial’ as used in the research refers to being under foreign rule, particularly the specific historicity of the New Territories as a British ruled enclave from 1898 to 1997.³ Furthermore, I take the colonial encounter in the New Territories during that historical period to be a critical contestation process between British rule and Chinese village communities with many intended and unintended consequences. The dominating/dominated relationship between the two was seldom stable but instead entailed unending disputes and shifting practices. As Nicholas Dirks pointed out,

“Any attempt to make a systematic statement about the colonial project runs the risk of denying the fundamental historicity of colonialism It is tempting but wrong to ascribe either intentionality or systematicity to a congeries of activities and a conjunction of outcomes that ... were usually diffuse, disorganized, and even contradictory.”

“Hegemony is perhaps the wrong word to use for colonial power, since it implies not only consent but political capacity to generate consent ..., notably absent in the colonial context.” (1992, p.7)

Notwithstanding the evidence of domination and resistance, some orthodox interpretations have represented the Chinese village communities in the New Territories as an entirely unchanging Chinese society from the immemorial past, ignoring the consequences of colonial impacts upon them and remarkable historical

³ The definition of ‘colonial’ I give here is by adopting Gordon Marshall’s one (1998, p.323-324) and putting it into a shorter form. I do not, by any means, claim that this definition represents an exclusive

changes during this period (Freedman, 1958; Ng, 1969; and Potter, 1969). In this regard, my research not only draws on some more novel and recent interpretations for the case studies reported in this dissertation (Chan, 1997, Chiu & Hung, 1997 and Chun, 2000), but also develops their empirical and theoretical insights concerning the changes observable in local practices in the New Territories during the colonial era. This thesis will show that, on the contrary, the local Chinese communities in the colonial New Territories should be viewed as a historical conjuncture intelligible only in a relational discussion that situates their existence in wider social, economic and political contexts.

Throughout the course of this discussion of the New Territories Chinese village communities under British colonial rule, the term ‘tradition’ will recur. *Chuan Tong* is a vernacular term that is often rendered as ‘tradition’. The first Chinese word *Chuan* in this expression originally refers to ‘the horse or the cart used in post office for delivery’ (Xu, S. [Tong, K. J. (Ed.)] 1985, p.1095). By extension, its existing meanings in the language have included ‘delivering’, ‘disseminating’, ‘proclaiming’, ‘passing on information’, ‘handing down knowledge’ and ‘succeeding to a family and even the throne’ (Xu, Z. S (Ed.), 1990, p. 94-95). As far as the second word *Tong* is concerned, it etymologically refers to ‘the main thread to weave threads together or

one but rather I suggest it for a working one for the discussion in this dissertation.

link up the threads' (Xu, S. [Tong, K. J. (Ed.)] 1985, p.1843). In Chinese it has generally developed meanings like 'system', 'ruling practice', 'leading framework', 'overall feature' 'matter from the same context' and 'continuity or succession from generation to generation' (Xu, Z. S (Ed.), 1990, p.1301-1302). The term *Chuan Tong* as a combination of these two words with their connotations usually means 'handing down from generation to generation of characteristic social features such as custom, ethic, thought, way of doing, art and system, etc' (Lo, C. F. (Ed.), 1993, p.1625). When local Chinese people talk about their *Chuan Tong* in everyday speech today, my study indicates that they usually take it to refer to their conventional lineage practices, great ceremonies, rites of passage and festival activities at both communal and domestic levels.

Accordingly, the normal Chinese-English translation of *Chuan Tong* into English as 'tradition' obviously refers to many meanings in common and by and large provides an adequate translation. As traced by Raymond William, 'tradition' in English originally carries the senses like 'to hand over or deliver', 'handing down knowledge', 'passing on a doctrine' and 'matters handed down from father to son' (1983, p. 318-320). As defined by the *Oxford Dictionary*, 'tradition' stands for 'a belief, custom or way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group of

people' (2000, p.1379). As identified by existing academic analysis, its common meaning in social usage refers to ceremony or ritual from the past and other historic practices or conventional activities (Cannadine, 1996; Trevor-Roper, 1996; Ranger, 1996; Williams; 1988).

However, Williams traces the elusiveness and the unsoundness of the term 'tradition' for the analysis of human practice, an important observation of which could be equally applied to the Chinese case not just to the English one. Specifically, he suggested that 'tradition' as it literally refers to the general process of handing down from the past frequently covers up the detailed process of any handing down that in practice must be selective, highly partial and full of variation. Despite this, some writers seek to ratify this term by using it in plural form with initial lower case letter, which he found largely inadequate, writing that:

"[W]hen we realize that there are traditions, and that only some of them or parts of them have been selected..., we can see how difficult Tradition really is ... as so often, ratifying use."

"It is sometimes observed, by those who looked into particular traditions, that it only takes two generations to make anything traditional But the word tends to move towards *age-old* Considering only how much has been handed down to us, and how various it actually is, this, in its own way, is both a betrayal and a surrender." (1976, p.319)

More recently, Hobsbawm and Ranger have further demonstrated that what is

generally taken, as ‘tradition’ may not necessarily be something from the past but rather a current invention appropriating the language of the past for the justification or creation of the specific present rule or practice. In their studies of the invention of tradition in Britain they wrote that

“‘Traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.” (1983, p. 1)

“[The] peculiarity of ‘invented tradition’ is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. ... [T]hey are responses to novel situations when take the form of reference to old situations, or when establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetitions.” (ibid, p.2)

Importantly, existing studies also found that “tradition” is not necessarily incompatible with “modernity”, neither is the contemporary social change to be a singular and lineal process from “tradition” to “modern” as some modernisation theorists widely maintained in the 1950s and 1960s (Fabian, 1983; Smith, 1973; Therborn, 2000 and Waters, 1999). Many apparently entirely bipolarized features brought under the general conceptual dichotomy of “tradition-modernity” by the modernization theorists, such as particularistic vs. universalistic, communalistic vs. individualistic, structurally diffuse vs. structurally specific, religion-centred vs. secular and material-oriented, can work in society at the same time without a clear split (Hall et al, 1996; Knobl, 2003 and Schelkle & Krauth, 2000). As Johannes Fabian wrote,

“Tradition and modernity are not “opposed” (except semiotically), nor are they in “conflict.” All this is (bad) metaphorical talk.” (1983, p.155)

From this position, I argue that the notion of ‘tradition’ in the New Territories is a profoundly problematic construct as well. I try to account for how some so-called ‘traditional’ Chinese institutions can be used and even (re-) invented in new contexts for new purposes instead of taking them as something to be fast disappearing in society. In particular, this dissertation shows how British colonial practices in the New Territories entailed a highly selective version of ‘Chinese tradition’ to suit their needs as rulers and that their selective use of ‘Chinese tradition’ in effect normalised a local Chinese form of patriarchy.

The term *Fu Quan* is usually translated as ‘patriarchy’. Literally, it means ‘the rule of father’ just as the English word does. However, the villagers in my study seldom use the term *Fu Quan*. When they talk about ‘patriarchy’ in their own discourse, they use no other specific words but they refer to it by directly discussing the powers and privileges the male household head could enjoy in their family and in the community at large. In analytical terms, these powers and privileges for the Chinese male household heads, as some existing studies pointed out, could include patrilocality, *patria potestas*, paternal authority over the domestic sphere, patrilineal

succession of family property, male-only membership of the communal corporation that controls the ancestral estate and the male-only rights to participate in communal affairs and decisions on an agnatic basis, etc (Deniz, 1997; Jones, 1995; Qu, 1967 and Sinn, 1994).

Above all, Barbara Rothman (1994) is absolutely right to suggest that ‘patriarchy’ should not be loosely used as a synonym for male domination. For, the term by definition refers to a rather specific form of male domination and that specific form of male domination only provides fatherhood with authority and superiority over other men and women. Most critically, Deniz Kandiyoti (1997) found that such overuse of the term in analysis might not only prevent us from seeing some remarkable specificities of patriarchy in practice, but it could even result in overestimating the actual magnitude of patriarchy in society. By concentrating on the example of Chinese household and community life, I equally argue that patriarchy is not a set of male privileges and powers which are conferred upon every man and that, in fact, Chinese men frequently fail to realise a patriarchy.

The dissertation also attempts to look at how patriarchy affects Chinese women. Following Mohanty, I take women to be a group of real, active subjects of their existences and collective histories instead of viewing them as a passive category of the

voiceless and motionless Other (Mohanty, 1991a & 1991b). Through drawing on the theoretical and empirical insights from the existing studies of Chinese women, I examine how Chinese women in the colonial New Territories individually and collectively engaged with patriarchal social structures and norms legitimized by the notion of 'Chinese tradition' at different levels.⁴

III. Research method and aim

In my study, I relied on direct ethnographic observations and investigations in a village community in the north New Territories through a two-year fieldwork from 1998 to 2000 (see Chapter 3 for more details). 'Reflexivity' as a key term in this ethnographic research will be used in two senses. The first one refers to the research paradigm which I have adopted for my fieldwork. The definition I use in this respect is:

"Reflexivity implies a shift in our understanding of data and its collection – something that is accomplished through detachment, internal dialogue, and constant (and intensive) scrutiny of "what I know" and "how I know it". To be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment." (Hertz, 1997, viii)

Since I will provide a special discussion of how I worked with reflexivity for my

⁴ See Chapter 2 for details.

fieldwork in Chapter 3, I shall not discuss it further here. The second meaning, and a broader one as well, refers to an important research matter my fieldwork sought to explore and ponder. Namely, it is the capacity of people who are making sense of themselves and are acting upon themselves or, rather, their self-awareness and self-articulation from within the milieu in which they are situated.⁵ The purpose of my research is to construct an account of the New Territories under British colonial rule, within which one can discern some essential practical features and grasp their specific empirical and conceptual relationships from the perspectives of various social actors, while acknowledging that they are, at the same time, trying to understand those relationships as guides to their own actions.

IV. Research significance

Taking these theoretical and methodological practices together, this thesis should help to contribute to knowledge in several ways. Firstly, it helps to redress an imbalance in existing studies, by setting these changes not only in the general Chinese context but also in the colonial one. By focusing on the colonial encounter as the main theme, this research instead may help to facilitate some different and more

⁵ Certainly, it is not new to take the term “reflexivity” as a general name for the capacity of people in making sense of themselves and acting upon themselves. Ethnomethodologists have extensively developed the term in this sense and argued for its central importance in sociological research. See

context-specific interpretations of the Chinese village communities in the New Territories.

Secondly, this research draws on direct ethnographic materials to take a special look at how in practice local people act, interact with and resist the official administration, legislation and developmental projects of British colonial rule in the New Territories. Furthermore, my ethnographic reports results from contemporary research into the current circumstances of the New Territories. Accordingly, the thesis may serve not only to throw some lights on an area which is currently less well documented (but see Chan (1997), Chun (1900 & 2000) and Jones (1995) as exceptions), but also to provide some more up-to-date ethnographic data for other researchers interested in the colonial New Territories.

Thirdly, this research takes the dimension of gender as a thematic issue and thereby shows its central importance in the New Territories not only in the local household and community practices, but also in the general socio-political relationships between Chinese villages and British colonial rulers. In this way my research will also contribute to field of gender in Chinese societies.

In short, the main purpose of this research is to produce a gender-specific community study of a Chinese village in the colonial New Territories, Hong Kong.

Garfinkel (1967) and Marshall et al (1998, p. 203-205) for details.

V. Dissertation organization

Chapter One outlines the general historical conjuncture in which Chinese village communities in the New Territories are situated and it outlines the colonial legacies relevant to the conceptual issues and the empirical matters that are followed through and reflected upon in the later chapters. Chapter Two describes the changing theoretical context in which the research in this dissertation was conducted. Above all, it indicates how this research draws on the insights from some recent publications to contribute a new set of questions to discussions of the New Territories, historically and currently. Chapter Three reflects upon some of the methodological issues addressed in carrying out this research in the field, in particular the 'self-other' dichotomy in the ethnographic encounter. Beyond that, it discusses the source of the diverse ethnographic materials and information from which the research comes.

Chapter Four considers a specific village case ethnographically. The chapter describes the fundamental transformation of this local village community and, by implication, the rapid social changes of the New Territories under British colonialism. The general purpose of this chapter is to recover an important page of social history, which has long been muted by dominant colonial discourses. Chapter Five addresses the vexing issue of the prevailing Chinese lineage organization in the village

communities in the New Territories. By drawing on genealogical information and fieldwork findings from the selected case-study, the discussion in this chapter demonstrates how Chinese lineage organization is structured on strong patriarchal lines and underwent a substantial revitalization during the British colonial period. At the same time, however, it was a critically contested terrain among the local patriarchs. There were more internal ruptures and dogfights among them as a consequence of increasingly forceful competition for landed interests, official titles and powers bestowed from the British colonial rule.

Chapter Six highlights the critical indeterminacy and vulnerability of Chinese patriarchy. By tracing the common gender-specific conduct of local people in their ordinary household and community lives, this chapter provides us with a discussion of some fundamental variances, local subtleties and dynamics, which by and large have remained unmarked. Chapter Seven further addresses gender issues by concentrating on the issue of female agency. Specifically, it illustrates how local women frequently have their own living order within but beyond the patriarchal realm of men in the village world. By playing out their bottom-up politics, they also have important influences not only upon the domestic domain, but also the public one. Chapter Eight examines an individual case study of one woman. Through a close discussion of her

life history and her long struggle for her family property, this chapter aims towards a comprehensive analysis of how the empirical and conceptual features identified in the previous chapters are in practice interconnected. Moreover, the chapter looks at the local struggles of women and their influence in shaping the society and history at large through important successes.

The conclusion recapitulates the main themes of these eight chapters and attempts to put forward some tentative views for the possible importance of Chinese village communities during the post-colonial era in the current situation of Hong Kong.

Chapter 1: The legacies of colonialism: a setting

Introduction

This chapter deals with the historical overview of British colonial rule, in particular with the shifting socio-political practices in the New Territories from 1898 to 1997. The first section traces the historical background up to the rise of indirect rule in the New Territories. The second section highlights the specific colonial practices in the indigenous Chinese villages. The third section examines colonial rule and the period of intensive planned development of the post-war New Territories. The last section contains a discussion on some of the recent history of the New Territories leading to the existing post-colonial era. The overall objective of this chapter is to outline the general social context in which the present research is situated.

I. Colonial policy and the expediency of indirect rule

British colonisers wrested Hong Kong Island from the Chinese, in 1841 under the *Treaty of Nanking*, but from the beginning they viewed the acquisition of this colony as a critical mistake in terms of their original intention to facilitate their economic interests in the China trade. Lord Palmerston, British Foreign Secretary in London,

angrily described Hong Kong as a “barren rock with hardly a house upon it” and immediately sacked Captain Elliot, British Plenipotentiary in China, responsible for the negotiation of this concession (Morse, 1910, pp. 641-643).

Subsequently, British colonisers by military and diplomatic means forced the issue of extending the territory of the colony, with the Chinese government. In 1860, they acquired the Kowloon peninsula from the Chinese through the *Treaty of Peking* (Liu, S. Y., 1995). In 1898, they further acquired the New Territories through the *Convention of the Extension of Hong Kong*. The final territorial acquisition from China however, was conditional and consisted of a temporary lease of 99 years instead of perpetual concessions like the previous two. The location of the New Territories was highly advantageous rather than being a piece of insignificant land without any considerable establishments (Liu, C. K., 1995).

The region of the New Territories was highly mountainous but a considerably larger and more populous place. Its physical size amounted to 376 square miles comprising about 88% of the overall area of Hong Kong. Its total population amounted to 102,254 in 423 villages.¹ Among the Chinese clans the predominant ones

¹ The statistical figures came from the official census data from the first colonial report of the New Territories by Steward Lockhart in 1899. However, the figure for the villages was a highly temporary and incomplete one with great variations in the later colonial reports of the New Territories. For instance, British colonisers in their second colonial report of the New Territories in 1900 updated this figure to 597. When they introduced the village representative system into the New Territories in the post-war period, they further updated this figure to 651 and fixed this amount into their rural

were the Dengs, the Liaos, the Wens, the Hous and the Pengs. The clans had developed into numerous branches dating from the Song (A.D. 1127-1279) or Ming Dynasty (A.D. 1368-1644). They also claimed to belong to *The Five Clans of the New Territories*, possessing abundant members, lands and locally powerful elites in the New Territories (Baker, 1966).

When British colonisers proceeded to take over the New Territories, they were confronted with hostile resistance from the local Chinese communities. From the beginning when the first British colonial expedition set out to explore the complex social and physical terrain, in preparation for future governance, the Chinese villagers in Kam Tin collectively boycotted their research team, throwing eggs at them and not only that but also closing off the village gate to lock them out. The British needed to call in 75 marines with 2 Maxim guns. They forced their way into the village and ended up conducting the survey by force. The British also confiscated the village gate, which had blocked their way, as a direct punishment of the disobedient Chinese villagers (Wesley-Smith, 1973).

Despite meeting with this violent suppression, local resistance to British colonial encroachment into the New Territories kept going on and became increasingly mobilised and organised. On the 27th March 1899, British colonisers worked to set up

administration system specifically for the indigenous Chinese community in the New Territories.

a mat shed for their first flag-hoisting ceremony on 17th April, at a hilltop in Tai Po, symbolising the official occupation of the New Territories. The Chinese villagers opposed the construction work on the grounds that it violated the injunctions of *Fung Shui*, claiming the hilltop to be private ancestral land.² On the 3rd of April, the British sent Henry May, Captain Superintendent in Hong Kong, to supervise the construction work. Chinese villagers then fought Mays' party and set fire to the mat shed. On the 15th of April, Chinese villagers even organized a secret armed force to attack the British and once again set fire to the mat shed in Tai Po. However, the British immediately fought back with increased force, which included a covering cannonade from their gunboats. On the next day, they defeated this rebellious Chinese force and brought the situation under control. They also smoothly finished their first flag-hoisting ceremony in Tai Po before they proceeded to crush the rebellion in Shang Tusen, New Territories.³

The duration of the Chinese uprising in the early colonial history of the New Territories was short-lived yet its impact upon the later formation of the New Territories was far-reaching. To placate local hostility and reach a quick settlement,

² Fung Shui literally means "wind" and "water" and, by implication, physical setting or geometry. There is a common Chinese belief that some specific physical patterns, topographies or arrangements bring good luck such as wealth or health to people. If it is changed or damaged, the well being of people will decline. For further discussion on the importance of *Fung Shui* in Chinese life see Shen, D. C. (1974), Baker (1964c) and Hayes (1963a, 1969, 1983a, 1983b & 1983c).

³ For the official documents related to this critical historical event see Hong Kong Government (1899,

the British expediently adjusted their ruling strategy in the New Territories. They kept to the original plan to put the New Territories under the existing general governance in Hong Kong but they also decided to implement the old and tried colonial policy of indirect rule.⁴

II. Special ruling practices

In 1899, The British made their first non-interventionist announcement to the New Territories in line with their policy of indirect rule and, above all, promised the Chinese villagers that they would keep their *status quo*:

“Your commercial and land interest will be safeguarded and your usages and good customs will not in any way be interfered with.”⁵

In practice, the British paid special attention to the issue of land and gave high priority to this matter in the establishment of their authority over the New Territories. During the first three years of colonial occupation, they conducted a thorough survey of the existing land tenure and ownership in every Chinese village in the New Territories.

Based on the information from this land survey, in 1905 they issued the *Block Crown*

pp. 511-639) For a more detailed historical account see Wesley-Smith (1980, pp.45-67).

⁴ In 1898, Steward Lockhart, the Special Commissioner in Hong Kong, had suggested adopting the policy of indirect rule for future colonial governance of the New Territories upon the completion of his fieldwork report. However, Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of Colonial Office in London, objected to this suggestion while proposing to put the New Territories under the existing general government of Hong Kong for convenience. It was not till the rise of the local Chinese resistance when Lockhart's original proposal was reconsidered and used. For details see Hong Kong Government (1899, pp. 511-639).

Lease, an official lease that covered each block of existing holdings with the terms of tenancy, a cadastral record of each plot of land and a demarcation map of them and this was used for tax collection purposes (Chun, 1990). In the same year, they also passed *The New Territories Land Ordinance* with specific legislative reference to the recognition of local Chinese villagers' customary right to land property in section 11:

“In any proceeding in Supreme Court in relation to land in the New Territories the Court shall have power to recognise and enforce any Chinese custom or customary right affecting such land.”⁶

Furthermore, this ordinance had a special clause in section 13 that maintained the existing collective ownership in the Chinese villagers' lineage organizations and that allowed the Chinese villagers to appoint their own *Si Li* (managers) in keeping with their communal ancestral land and estate practices:

“Whenever any land is held from the Crown under Lease of other grant, agreement or license in the name of clan, family or t'ong shall appoint a Manager or Managers to represent it, and may from time to time appoint a new Manager. Every such appointment and change shall be reported at the appropriate office, and the Land Officer on receiving such proof as he may require of such appointment, shall, if he approves thereof, register the name of the said Manager or Managers: the said Manager or Managers thereupon shall after giving such notices as may be prescribed have full power to dispose of or in any way deal with the said land as if he or they were sole owner thereof, subject to the consent of the Land Officer, and shall be personally liable for the payment of all rents and charges and for the observance of all covenants and conditions in respect of the said land.

⁵ Hong Kong Government (1899, p.532).

⁶ Hong Kong Government (1905, p.8).

Every instruments relating to land held by a clan, family or t'ong which is executed or signed by the registered Manager or Managers thereof in the presence of the Land Officer and is attested by him, shall be as effectual for all the member of the said clan, family or t'ong.”⁷

In 1910, after the preliminary legislative tasks had been completed, what ensued was the *New Territories Ordinance*, a specialised socio-political governance order for the New Territories.⁸ Nevertheless, the Chinese villagers had continuing never ending individual and collective disputes with the British concerning their traditional right to land (Nelson, 1969a). As late as 1972, the British introduced the *Small House Policy* in the pursuit of a settlement. They used the term “indigenous inhabitants” originally to refer to the predominantly Chinese villagers in the New Territories but officially the term had a highly specific meaning. Namely, the British recognized as an ‘indigenous inhabitant’ only patrilineal male descendants of those men who were permanently living in the villages in the New Territories at the 1st of July 1898. In other words, the social category ‘indigenous inhabitant’ invented by the colonial rule totally excluded women and subsequent immigrants from the official village policy in the New Territories. *The Small House Policy* also specified that only the “indigenous inhabitants” were eligible for an official allowance to build one premium-free village

⁷ Hong Kong Government (1905, pp. 8-9).

⁸ *Law of Hong Kong*. Chapter 97 (Hong Kong Government, 1910).

house during their lifetime.⁹

In addition to these legislations and conditions of land tenure, British colonisers also adopted special administrative practices to rule over the Chinese village communities in the New Territories. In 1906, they introduced the District Office into the New Territories and continued to increase its staff numbers in order to extend their governance of the Chinese villages (Figure 1.1). Moreover, the District Office had taken on a highly comprehensive role in the Chinese villages until the colonial government eventually put the New Territories under the general administration of Hong Kong.¹⁰ District Officers also had claimed to work as a traditional Chinese *Fu-mu-kuan* (paterfamilias-like officer) for the local Chinese villagers and followed customary order and law in their ruling practice (Miner, 1975).

On the other hand, the British utilised Chinese villagers' social organizations to develop socio-political governance in the New Territories. In 1924, a group of village

⁹ As I will show in the following discussion in the main text, land is an overwhelmingly expensive commodity in Hong Kong. The essential advantage of this Small House policy -- the special official allowance to the construction of a premium-free house -- for the indigenous inhabitants (male) gives them no need to buy expensive land from the public auction by government or the private market. Rather, they could simply obtain a free one from direct application to the government. In other words, when they go to build their own house, they just need to cover the construction costs. For details see Ng, W. M. (1996).

¹⁰ The specific ruling tasks of the District Office in the New Territories included collecting information, enforcing official policy, maintaining law and order, undertaking land administration and control, seeing the village leaders and people, providing social welfare and urgent relieves, mediating local disputes and helping local development. However, the general administrative trend in the New Territories by the Hong Kong government since the post-war period was to reduce the level of concentration upon the District Office. In 1993, the Hong Kong government even set up the Home Affairs Branch to combine the rural administration of the New Territories with the general urban administration of Hong Kong (Liu, R. H., 1999).

Figure 1.1: The development of the District Office in the New Territories

Year	1899	1913	1948	1957	1960	1974	1979	1980
No. of Districts	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9
Name of Districts	New Territories	North	Yuen Long	YL	YL	YL	YL	YL
					Tuen Mun	TM	TM	TM
			Tai Po	TP	TP	TP	TP	TP
							North	N
					Sha Tin	ST	ST	ST
		South	S	Tsuen Wan	TW	TW	TW	TW
								Kwai Tsing
				Islands	Sai Kung	SK	SK	SK
					Is	Is	Is	Is

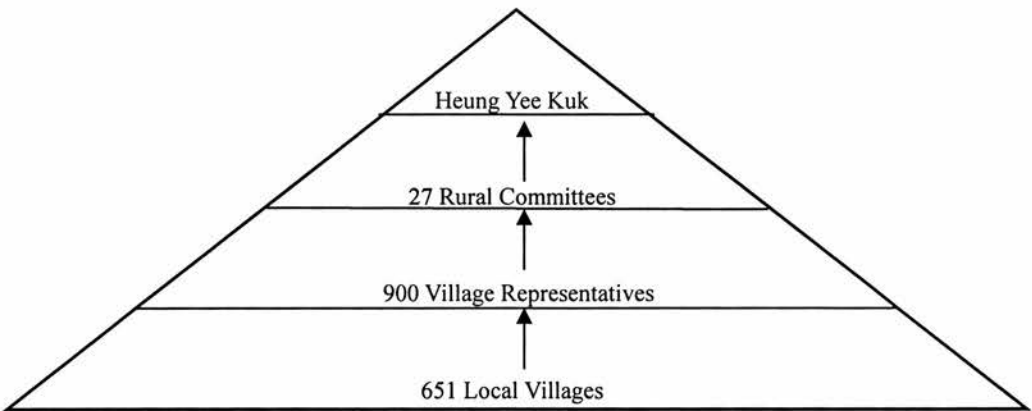
Source: Ng, W. M., 1996, p.39.

elites and clan leaders set up a committee called *Xin Jie Nong Gong Shang Yan Jiu Zong Hui* (literally, New Territories Agriculture, Industry and Commerce Research Association) in order to fight for their land rights. In 1926, Hong Kong Governor Cecil Clementi, made a visit to the villagers and acknowledged their organization with a suggestion for them to rename their organization as *Heung Yee Kuk* (literally, Rural Consultative Committee).¹¹ By 1959, the British had officially and legislatively recognized the Heung Yee Kuk as the highest statutory advisory body of the New

¹¹ Clementi suggested changing their committee name because their original name during that cold war period sounded like an organization of the Chinese Communist Party for promoting Communism. In other words, it was to avoid political misunderstanding of their committee (Liu, R. H., 1999). But, surely, this specific practice by Clementi appeared to be politically expedient in limiting local Chinese power and to limit their roles as ‘consultative’.

Territories by enacting the *Heung Yee Kuk Ordinance*. Accordingly, Heung Yee Kuk in the New Territories formally became the top institution in the official representation system with 27 Rural Committees in the middle and 651 villages at the base (Figure 1.2). In each village, the villagers could openly elect or appoint one to three official village representatives, depending on the village size, every four years. These village representatives about 900 in total, became the council members in the Rural Committees. The Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen in the Rural Committees from internal elections among the village representatives in turn became the council members for the Heung Yee Kuk (Lam, 1986).

Figure 1.2: The village representation system in the New Territories



III. The post-war development

During the Second World War, the British surrendered Hong Kong and the whole territory to the Japanese regime from 1941 to 1945. The Japanese occupation brought terrific devastation along with economic chaos in Hong Kong. Not only were numerous people killed or died from starvation, but also there were great numbers that fled Hong Kong. All British residents and important officials including the Governor were interned in detention camps under intensive military surveillance. It is estimated that the local population suffered from a downturn in numbers about one million (from 1,600,000 in 1941 to 600,000 in 1945) (Xie, 1995).

After the British resumed colonial rule at the end of the war, Hong Kong's population grew significantly with the influx of Chinese refugees and achieved exceptional growth and expansion in its industrial economy. From the mid 50s, the colonial government established new towns in the New Territories in order to sustain this rapid post-war development, as a consequence of the critical shortage of land in the existing but overcrowding conurbation of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon.

In effect, the colonial government undertook extensive land resumption from the Chinese villagers in the New Territories and even undertook resettlement of their communities for developmental use, in particular the establishment of new public

housing estates and new industrial sites. Private developers also began to shift their investments into the New Territories and for the most part continued to increase the annual rate of residential and industrial building investments (Figure 1.3a and 1.3b). Despite the generally lower market value of land than in the rest of Hong Kong, the private landed developments in the New Territories saw outstanding rising market values with only a few years of exception (Figure 1.4a and 1.4b).

In total, the colonial government built 11 extensive new towns and held a significant amount of public housing in the New Territories for the general population of Hong Kong (Figure 1.5). The current demographic center of Hong Kong has shifted from the earliest developed Hong Kong Island to include the newly established New Territories. Up to 1996, the census information indicated that the population in the New Territories was close to three million and comprised nearly half of the total population in Hong Kong (Figure 1.6).

By contrast, the recognized “indigenous inhabitants” and their dependants were no longer the only social group in the New Territories. Even the Heung Yee Kuk claimed their members amounted to 700,000 and right up to 1995, they still did not constitute a majority by comparison with the total amount of late migrants, mostly the

urban ones, in the New Territories.¹²

Common agricultural backgrounds that had held the communities together became a thing of the past. To look into this issue through official statistics, the records indicated that a paddy as a main agricultural item had had no validity since 1986. Other items like market garden crops, field crops and orchards had some short expansions during the 60s or 70s but quickly decreased in production in later periods. The total amount of farmland from 1954 to 1997 fell from 135,252 to 7,490 hectares while abandoned or fallow fields increased from 1,098 to 4,290 hectares (Figure 1.7).

In general, the post-war New Territories saw great social and economic transformations towards integration with a highly industrialised and urbanised Hong Kong while the formerly predominant village communities increasingly became displaced with the rapid decline of their land. Interestingly, the official discourse also recognised this drastic trend which contradicted the original non-interventionist policy of indirect rule:

“For decades the New Territories have been dormant, situated within a few miles of a modern metropolis yet remaining largely undisturbed and unaffected by the progress of the twentieth century. Now the town is spilling over into the country; old villages are being uprooted and replaced by urban development; village market centers are being transformed into

¹² The official census statistics does not provide breakdown data for the amount of indigenous inhabitant in the New Territories. This census figure comes from Heung Yee Kuk and by their estimation this figure includes the indigenous inhabitants and their families who are living abroad but amount to about 70,000 to 80,000 (Ng, W. M., 1996, p.26).

substantial towns. Throughout much of the territory the picture is one of upheaval and change as blocks of modern flats replace dingy, single-story houses and as industry spreads and grows in many parts of the formerly rural areas.” (District Office, 1959-60, p.1)

IV. Sino-British diplomatic dispute and the end of colonial rule

Under the 99-year lease, the New Territories was a temporary acquisition of the colony of Hong Kong. The British colonial occupation was to end on the 30th of June 1997 whilst the Chinese national regime could re-take the New Territories on the 1st of July 1997. This peculiar leasing issue of the New Territories, a leftover from the history of the 18th century, prompted Britain to begin formal discussions with China in 1982.

Both China and Britain reached the quick consensus that Hong Kong could not exist without the New Territories. The issue of the lease could not view the New Territories in isolation but had to include Hong Kong Island and Kowloon peninsula or, rather, the overall politico-jurisdictional circumstance of post-1997 Hong Kong. In 1984, China and Britain released their first bilateral diplomatic agreement *The Sino-British Joint Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong* (Yang, Bao & Shen, 1997 & Li, 1988).

Accordingly, Britain agreed to return the whole colony of Hong Kong to China in 1997 and work with China to prepare for the changing sovereignty of Hong Kong

prior to the end of their rule. China promised to introduce the policy of ‘one country, two systems’ to rule over Hong Kong. Namely, Hong Kong’s people would be allowed to hold their existing capitalist system and way of life with a high degree of autonomy, despite the different socialist practices of Mainland China. The existing stability and prosperity of Hong Kong would be maintained under the Chinese national rule in future, and this peculiar ruling policy in Hong Kong would remain unchanged for 50 years.¹³

In connection with the principals from *Joint Declaration*, China in 1985 began to draft *The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China* which was a sub-constitution endorsed by the *Chinese Constitution* to specify the ruling framework special for post-1997 Hong Kong. There were however, increasing disagreements with China from both Britain and Hong Kong for their lack of participation in the drafting process. Subsequently, China also engaged in a critical political dispute with Britain before their formal resumption of the sovereignty of Hong Kong (McLaren, 1997 & Nicholas, 1999).

In 1992, Britain appointed Christopher Patten to be the last Governor of the colony for the last 5 years in Hong Kong. In his first policy address, Patten put

¹³ For the full version of *Joint Declaration* in English please see McLaren (1997, pp.58-60); in Chinese please see Yeung, Bao & Shen (1997, pp. 466-468).

forward political reforms to increase the number of seats from direct election and the size of the electoral population for the coming 1995 election of the Legislative Council in Hong Kong. China immediately and vehemently denounced Patten's reform proposal as a breach of the previous agreements and understandings underwritten by the *Joint Declaration* and the *Basic Law*. Patten however, stuck to his position and claimed he had made no violations at. Most importantly, China required Britain to withdraw Patten's reform proposal throughout their later bilateral diplomatic negotiations. China also utilised many opportunities through the mass media to reinforce their political stance on the issue of Hong Kong and repeatedly challenged Patten's reform proposal as a colonial conspiracy created in order to ferment social disorder and obstruct the smooth political transition of Hong Kong to the fatherland. Nevertheless, Patten's reform proposal gained wide support from Hong Kong and was formally approved by Hong Kong's Legislative Council in 1994 (Nicholas, 1999).

Under these circumstances, China swiftly proclaimed that the future government in Hong Kong would neutralise any political changes from Patten's reform proposal. Furthermore, they would immediately prepare another Legislative Council on their own to replace the existing one for the post-colonial administration of Hong Kong in

accordance with the *Basic Law* and the decisions from their National People's Congress. Thus in the last public election of Legislative Council under British colonial regime in 1995, Patten's reform proposal were fully implemented and China subsequently established *The Provisional Legislative Council*, in preparation for the future administration of Hong Kong. There was no improvement in their relationship but rather a series of unending humdrum political rows. This unpleasant impasse was the most frequent feature throughout the remaining de-colonisation period of Hong Kong up to the last historical moments culminating in the spectacular changing of sovereignty ceremony of Hong Kong in 1997.

**Figure 1.3a: Statistics on the annual completion of private domestic in the
New Territories with comparison with the rest of Hong Kong**

Year	Hong Kong		Kowloon		New Kowloon		New Territories		Total	
1971	5480	(45%)	2155	(18%)	3205	(26%)	1400	(11%)	12240	(100%)
1972	9455	(43%)	4140	(19%)	5474	(25%)	2975	(13%)	22045	(100%)
1973	7620	(29%)	6230	(24%)	5680	(22%)	6035	(25%)	25565	(100%)
1974	7550	(36%)	4470	(22%)	4410	(21%)	4335	(21%)	20765	(100%)
1975	6135	(42%)	3020	(21%)	2480	(17%)	2895	(20%)	14530	(100%)
1976	5840	(38%)	3285	(21%)	3975	(26%)	2325	(15%)	15425	(100%)
1977	9245	(44%)	3340	(16%)	3935	(19%)	4350	(21%)	20870	(100%)
1978	13310	(51%)	5375	(20%)	3690	(14%)	3855	(15%)	26230	(100%)
1979	14160	(51%)	6350	(23%)	2785	(10%)	4500	(16%)	27795	(100%)
1980	8005	(33%)	3330	(14%)	3765	(15%)	9390	(38%)	24490	(100%)
1981	11820	(35%)	2650	(7%)	6585	(19%)	13420	(39%)	33475	(100%)
1982	6460	(28%)	1020	(5%)	2115	(9%)	13545	(58%)	23140	(100%)
1983	8345	(39%)	940	(4%)	1395	(6%)	10940	(51%)	21620	(100%)
1984	4710	(21%)	2630	(12%)	4605	(21%)	10325	(46%)	22270	(100%)
1985	10015	(34%)	2500	(8%)	3725	(12%)	13635	(46%)	29875	(100%)
1986	12875	(38%)	3215	(9%)	1970	(6%)	16045	(47%)	34105	(100%)
1987	11865	(34%)	3360	(10%)	2715	(8%)	16435	(48%)	34375	(100%)
1988	13615	(40%)	2735	(8%)	805	(2%)	17315	(50%)	34470	(100%)
1989	12570	(34%)	3475	(10%)	1650	(5%)	18790	(51%)	36485	(100%)
1990	5900	(20%)	1620	(6%)	4025	(14%)	17855	(60%)	29400	(100%)
1991	7095	(21%)	1595	(5%)	6765	(20%)	17925	(54%)	33380	(100%)
1992	7165	(28%)	1093	(4%)	3971	(15%)	13993	(53%)	26222	(100%)
1993	8862	(32%)	1407	(5%)	965	(3%)	16439	(60%)	27673	(100%)
1994	6986	(21%)	1091	(3%)	2778	(8%)	23318	(68%)	34173	(100%)
1995	5068	(22%)	1759	(8%)	1033	(5%)	14761	(65%)	22621	(100%)
1996	3596	(18%)	833	(4%)	1258	(6%)	14188	(72%)	19875	(100%)
1997	1240	(7%)	607	(3%)	254	(1%)	16092	(89%)	18202	(100%)

Source: Hong Kong Rating and Valuation Department. *Property Review*, various issues.

In 1971, the data of the New Territories only covered Tsuen Wan, the earliest developed area. Figures in percentages are rounding figures.

**Figure 1.3b: A statistical comparison between Hong Kong and the New Territories
of the annual numbers of completed private multi-storeyed factories**

Unit: m²

Year	Hong Kong	Kowloon	New Kowloon	New Territories	Total
1971	134875 (16%)	108655 (13%)	346076 (41%)	258863 (31%)	848469 (100%)
1972	211978 (25%)	36107 (5%)	228310 (27%)	359297 (43%)	835692 (100%)
1973	35440 (9%)	31774 (8%)	85102 (23%)	226199 (60%)	378515 (100%)
1974	105100 (28%)	27900 (8%)	50300 (14%)	192000 (50%)	375300 (100%)
1975	43400 (21%)	33400 (16%)	21100 (10%)	108200 (53%)	206100 (100%)
1976	71700 (27%)	30500 (11%)	69700 (26%)	94800 (36%)	266700 (100%)
1977	159700 (19%)	31100 (4%)	245200 (30%)	390100 (47%)	826100 (100%)
1978	118800 (11%)	36700 (3%)	422400 (39%)	513600 (47%)	1091500 (100%)
1979	20100 (2%)	79300 (6%)	282000 (22%)	896300 (70%)	1277700 (100%)
1980	67800 (7%)	60100 (6%)	328000 (34%)	520800 (53%)	976700 (100%)
1981	108600 (10%)	46900 (4%)	212000 (19%)	754000 (67%)	1121500 (100%)
1982	73100 (7%)	54300 (5%)	167100 (16%)	746600 (72%)	1041100 (100%)
1983	61400 (10%)	45900 (7%)	150200 (24%)	363400 (59%)	620900 (100%)
1984	81600 (19%)	54100 (13%)	118800 (28%)	174900 (40%)	429400 (100%)
1985	40800 (9%)	27400 (6%)	121300 (27%)	266600 (58%)	456100 (100%)
1986	62800 (10%)	116800 (19%)	247600 (41%)	183300 (30%)	610500 (100%)
1987	4600 (1%)	63100 (12%)	239900 (44%)	233000 (43%)	540600 (100%)
1988	76000 (7%)	1400 (1%)	236200 (21%)	791700 (71%)	1105300 (100%)
1989	129500 (15%)	91300 (11%)	147900 (17%)	495500 (57%)	864200 (100%)
1990	217700 (37%)	37700 (6%)	104600 (19%)	225500 (38%)	585500 (100%)
1991	65900 (13%)	17400 (3%)	157000 (30%)	280400 (54%)	520700 (100%)
1992	79400 (14%)	4600 (1%)	84000 (15%)	387900 (70%)	555900 (100%)
1993	30800 (10%)	16000 (5%)	22900 (7%)	241200 (78%)	310900 (100%)
1994	30400 (11%)	1000 (1%)	90500 (34%)	144400 (54%)	266300 (100%)
1995	19300 (8%)	13400 (5%)	84800 (34%)	131100 (53%)	248600 (100%)
1996	34500 (14%)	1400 (1%)	82200 (34%)	123400 (51%)	241500 (100%)
1997	12600 (7%)	9300 (5%)	43900 (24%)	115100 (64%)	180900 (100%)

Source: Hong Kong Rating and Valuation Department. *Property Review*, various issues.

In 1971, the data of the New Territories only covered Tsuen Wan, the earliest developed area. For the period of 1971 to 1973, the old official measurement unit in square feet has been converted into the metric figures by my calculation for consistency. Figures in percentages are rounding figures.

Figure 1.4a: A comparison of the average purchase prices of private domestic dwellings between the New Territories and Hong Kong

		Unit: \$/m ²													
Class	Area	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
A	New Territories	6383	7444	7635	9454	12112	14379	15909	23145	32881	36019	41203	38883	41713	59481
	Hong Kong	7400	8743	9134	10975	13940	18076	20775	27917	38930	42905	52209	49324	52369	69304
	Kowloon	7302	8166	8968	10837	13852	17968	19590	25422	34552	37770	42682	41369	43721	56537
	New Kowloon	6982	8241	8944	10896	13641	16728	18497	24391	32696	36605	41775	39629	43193	57606
B	New Territories	6669	6720	6889	8663	11472	14102	15650	22454	32539	37002	42189	39424	43230	59606
	Hong Kong	7378	8932	9166	10868	13911	18343	20976	28755	41152	48154	62044	56066	62125	83568
	Kowloon	6199	6629	7046	8187	10906	14670	16347	21926	30676	36473	42067	39609	42836	54983
	New Kowloon	6362	6720	7841	9573	11890	15149	16435	22818	30624	39405	48388	46166	52297	70427
C	New Territories	7490	8223	7686	10092	12315	14150	12666	19100	30623	34669	42908	39713	46601	68305
	Hong Kong	7585	10214	9760	11631	14714	18949	20698	28505	44019	52781	72028	63740	74573	104374
	Kowloon	7030	8928	8451	10182	13107	17278	19079	25486	35934	44805	54335	49584	55321	76248
	New Kowloon	6522	8172	9426	11212	13856	17286	19420	24902	36137	43343	51973	48274	54927	81892
D	New Territories	6422	6839	7772	9741	12147	14790	15498	20863	34200	41822	53548	47929	54889	80414
	Hong Kong	7442	10913	10892	12209	15655	20089	20514	27100	42941	53242	74627	67433	82364	115910
	Kowloon	6650	9264	9431	11373	13646	17054	18087	22185	33362	39920	47392	47376	52923	79530
	New Kowloon	6991	9804	10272	12029	15338	18914	20118	26156	38485	45297	61870	56909	60582	84892
E	New Territories	6041	7041	6534	8284	11124	12827	15038	19910	30146	40966	59010	53362	58670	80039
	Hong Kong	7613	12315	12080	13708	17163	21751	20174	25490	40902	52759	82911	74031	93657	136138
	Kowloon	7077	11430	11386	10369	17628	20823	24425	28536	41588	49305	63661	65824	74247	136322
	New Kowloon	7012	9449	7471	13194	17004	21226	19459	24767	40137	50831	69898	62785	80924	122227

Source: Hong Kong Rating and Valuation Department. *Property Review* (1985-98).

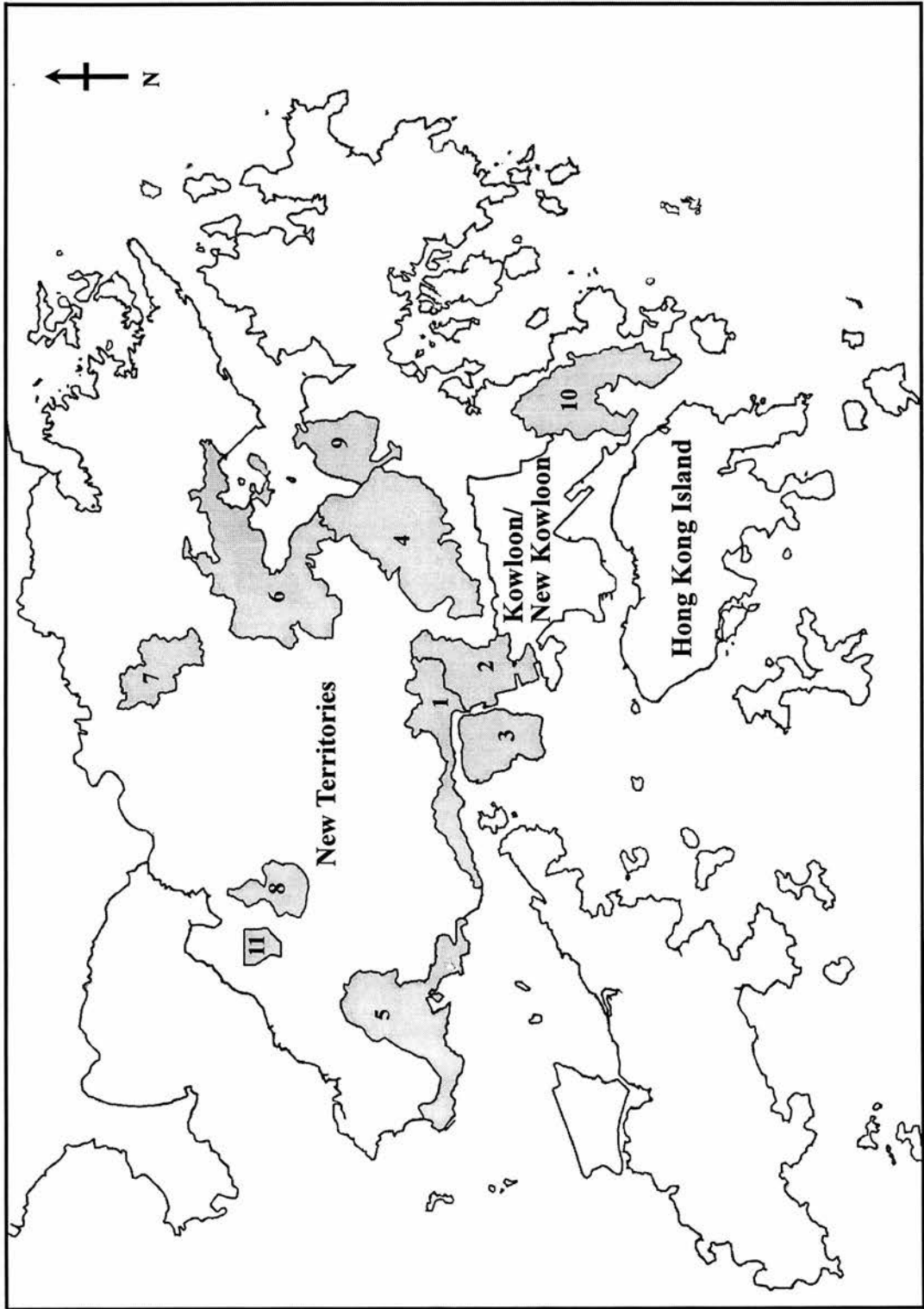
From 1984-1986, no official data for the whole year was given. The available official data for the last third or fourth quarter in these two years are taken instead. The classification of private domestic are: **Class A**: not exceeding 39.9 square meters; **Class B**: over 40 but not exceeding 69.9 square meters; **Class C**: over 70 but not exceeding 99.9 square meters; **Class D**: over 100 but not exceeding 159.9 square meters and **Class E**: over 160 square meters. For details see Technical Notes in *Property Review*.

Figure 1.4b: A comparison of average purchase prices of private multi-storeyed factories between the New Territories and Hong Kong

Year	\$/m ²			
	Hong Kong	Kowloon	New Kowloon	New Territories
1986	4361	4746	4102	3052
1987	5426	6343	5576	4273
1988	7892	9255	8302	6238
1989	10409	12041	10798	7665
1990	11739	12931	11995	8140
1991	12922	14180	13380	8925
1992	17343	17745	17653	11251
1993	22678	21208	21737	13648
1994	23924	21465	24791	13807
1995	21612	19331	21028	12664
1996	18608	16221	18493	11363
1997	19239	14893	18944	11375

Source: Hong Kong Rating and Valuation Department. *Property Review*, various issues.

Figure 1.5. The postwar development of new towns in the New Territories



New town	Year of designation
1. Tsuen Wan	1960
2. Kwai Chung	
3. Tsing Yi	
4. Sha Tin	1965
5. Tuen Mun	
6. Tai Po	Early 1979
7. Fanling	
8. Yuen Long	
9. Ma On Shan	Late 1979
10. Tseung Kwan O	
11. Tin Shui Wai	1982

Source: Ng, W. M (1996), p. 64

Public housings	Unit in stock (up to1997)
New Territories	511223 (54%)
Kowloon	27321 (3%)
New Kowloon	290868 (31%)
Hong Kong Island	117310 (12%)
Overall	946722 (100%)

Figures calculated from Hong Kong Rating and Valuation Department: *Property Review* (1998).

Map: adopted from Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department: *Hong Kong Population Report 1996*. (1997)

Figure 1.6: The rapid population growth in the New Territories

Year	Hong Kong	Kowloon	New Kowloon	Marine	New Territories	Total
1911	244323 (53.4%)	56186 (12.3%)	13205 (2.8%)	61798 (13.5%)	81227 (17.7%)	456739 (100%)
1921	347401 (55.5%)	113961 (18.2%)	9487 (1.5%)	71154 (11.3%)	83163 (13.3%)	625166 (100%)
1931	409203 (48.6%)	240386 (28.6%)	22634 (2.6%)	70093 (8.3%)	98157 (11.6%)	840473 (100%)
1961	1004875 (32.1%)	725177 (23.1%)	852849 (27.2%)	136802 (4.3%)	409945 (13.1%)	3129648 (100%)
1966	1030970 (27.7%)	690180 (18.6%)	1342650 (36.2%)	102520 (2.7%)	542600 (14.6%)	3708920 (100%)
1971	996183 (25.3%)	716272 (18.1%)	1478581 (37.5%)	79894 (2.0%)	665700 (16.9%)	3936630 (100%)
1976	1026870 (23.3%)	749600 (17.0%)	1628880 (36.9%)	59200 (1.3%)	938440 (21.3%)	4402990 (100%)
1981	1183621 (23.7%)	2449021 (49.1%)	-- (--)	49747 (0.9%)	1304171 (26.1%)	4986560 (100%)
1986	1201459 (21.8%)	2349445 (42.7%)	-- (--)	37553 (0.6%)	1907031 (34.7%)	5495488 (100%)
1991	1250993 (22.0%)	2030683 (35.7%)	-- (--)	17620 (0.3%)	2374818 (41.8%)	5674114 (100%)
1996	1312637 (21.1%)	1987996 (31.9%)	-- (--)	10190 (0.1%)	2906733 (46.7%)	6217556 (100%)

Source: Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department. *Hong Kong Census*, various issues.

From 1981, New Kowloon is combined with Kowloon into one district.

Figure 1.7: Annual decline of the agricultural sector in the New Territories

Year	Unit: hectares						Total
	Paddy	Market Garden Crops	Field Crops	Orchard	Fish Pond	Abandoned /fallow	
1954	9450	912	1407	385	--	1098	13252
1958	8988	1462	1382	447	--	1056	13335
1960	8724	1792	1484	585	239	857	13681
1961	8024	2497	1840	633	320	740	14054
1962	7843	2615	1873	643	400	724	14098
1963	7268	2760	1768	635	461	821	13713
1964	6689	3334	1469	639	530	955	13616
1965	5783	3278	1355	631	651	1970	13668
1966	6090	3330	1319	655	687	1545	13626
1967	5815	3504	1201	671	732	1683	13609
1968	5855	3585	1173	643	801	1513	13570
1969	5872	3804	1015	631	837	1384	13543
1970	5602	3949	861	623	912	1537	13484
1971	4568	4053	800	641	999	2288	13349
1972	3771	4181	711	635	1084	2806	13188
1973	2978	4196	627	623	1165	3314	12903
1974	2282	4528	453	643	1331	3484	12721
1975	1110	4980	380	650	1550	3590	12260
1976	1130	4790	240	620	1880	3240	11900
1977	330	4170	100	560	1870	4100	11130
1978	110	3740	100	500	1970	4060	10480
1979	40	3490	90	570	1830	4120	10140
1980	30	3180	80	620	1820	4240	9970
1981	10	2970	80	690	1840	4260	9850
1982	10	2930	70	680	1890	4200	9800
1983	10	2810	60	670	2100	4100	9750
1984	10	2760	60	600	2090	4110	9630
1985	10	2720	50	540	2080	4150	9500
1986	0	2660	50	540	2130	4070	9450
1987	0	2510	50	530	2110	4070	9270
1988	0	2400	50	540	1810	4060	8860
1989	0	2230	50	560	1720	4060	8620
1990	0	2090	50	580	1660	4040	8420
1991	0	1980	60	620	1650	4030	8340
1992	0	1810	50	620	1620	4100	8200
1993	0	1740	50	620	1610	4110	8130
1994	0	1600	50	630	1580	4040	7900
1995	0	1350	50	670	1560	4200	7830
1996	0	1240	40	670	1480	4240	7670
1997	0	1080	40	670	1410	4290	7490

Source: Hong Kong Agriculture and Fishers Department. *Annual Report*, various issues.

During the 50s, no official survey data of land utilisation in the New Territories were available except for 1954 and 1958. In this table, the metric data from 1954 to 1974 has been converted from the old official measurement unit in acres by my calculation for consistency. *Paddy* includes *Fresh Water Paddy*, *1-Crop Upland Rice* and *Brackish Water Paddy* in the official sub-divisions.

Chapter 2: Towards a gender-specific community study of the New Territories: a literature review

Introduction

The peculiar continuity of the Chinese communities in the New Territories under British colonial rule has created a long debate in Sinological researches. Whilst some Western and Chinese scholars have viewed them as rare remnants of traditional Chinese society, beyond the reach of contemporary history as a consequence of the non-interventionist colonial policy of indirect rule, others have increasingly argued to the contrary that these Chinese communities have been fundamentally transformed throughout British colonial era, and that the notion of a ‘traditional Chinese society’ in the colonial New Territories is by and large a pure conceptual construct.

This chapter concentrates, first of all, on how a long-lasting orthodox interpretation of the New Territories has been established on the basis of Maurice Freedman’s studies on Chinese lineage organisation or, rather his structural-functional essentialising of Chinese communities in the New Territories as a convenient temporal other. I then highlight some important modifications of this orthodox interpretation by other researchers and thereby draw on their new theoretical canons and empirical insights to reach a new analytical framework for the study of the New Territories. This

chapter also uses some colonial studies to indicate how the subject matter of the colonial encounter is of central importance to the study of New Territories. Finally, the discussion of the Chinese communities in the colonial New Territories could be linked with some essential insights from existing Chinese gender studies to contribute to new research with new directions and questions.

I. Sinological knowledge and British Colonialism

From about the late 1950s, anthropological and historical studies have commonly taken the indigenous Chinese villages in the New Territories as their research object in their pursuit of the prototype of traditional Chinese society. Inherent in their pursuit is an explicitly or implicitly shared proposition that something called ‘traditional Chinese society’ was disappearing under the impact of modern changes. In Mainland China, forceful social reforms by the Communist government had transformed local communities and thereby compromised the continuity of traditional Chinese society. Instead, it was argued that the New Territories under British colonial rule -- which ostensibly avoided radical changes in Chinese tradition through culturally sensitive governance -- exceptionally kept intact traditional Chinese society in the local village

communities and so enabled its perpetuation.¹

The research in and about the Chinese village communities in the New Territories during the British colonial era was by and large inspired by Maurice Freedman's Chinese lineage studies. From the inception of his research on the structure of the Chinese lineage organisation, he recognized that the New Territories was an excellent historical and anthropological treasury for the study of traditional Chinese institutions and practices. In 1958, he wrote:

"In the New Territories of Hong Kong both historical research and anthropological field work are possible. From my own brief experience of this area ..., I should say that anthropologist could answer certain important questions about the south-eastern China from a study of the small part of it which is under the British rule." (p. vi)

In 1963, he argued that the New Territories offered "perhaps the best living example ... of traditional Chinese country life" (p. 193), a view he forcefully repeated some three years later:

¹ In the following discussion, I look closely into some details of how this common proposition prevails in the Sinological research of the New Territories and what are the remarkable subject matters in this regard. However, it has to be noted that the rise of this practice in the New Territories came from a practical consideration of the exclusive political circumstances of Mainland China in the past as well. Jack Potter in a preface of his study has pointed it out: "Given the present political situation, the New Territories were as close to China as I could get. ... Like other students of China, I hope the conditions will someday improve Until then, I am afraid that anthropologists studying China will remain 'fish out of water'." (1968, p. viii) There also are some who worked on the same proposition to trace traditional Chinese institutions and practices but sought them in Taiwan. For instance, Myron Cohen in his rural Taiwan family studies claimed: "On the China mainland the 'large' family can no longer be a viable institution if the transformation of society in the People's Republic has been as thorough as desired by the country's leadership. Even in Hong Kong, including the still largely rural New Territories, industrialization and urbanization have been along lines that discourage the maintenance of traditional 'large' families. ... Although it is possible that life throughout Taiwan may change significantly under the impact of new political forces..., I would nevertheless hope that more studies of the traditional Chinese family system will be forthcoming. Such studies record a way of life doomed to

“I should like to help dispel the notion that the New Territories have been so far affected by British rule and modern changes in population and economic life that they are no longer capable of being useful to anthropologists interested in the study of traditional Chinese institutions. ... [O]ld lineages still exists; power is exercised within them; land is still held in ancestral trusts, rites of worship continue to be held in ancestral halls. ... We may see something of what went on under the Chinese Empire ...” (1966, p. viii).

From this position, he produced a grand narrative of traditional Chinese society by taking Chinese lineage organisation as a thematic issue and using the New Territories as an empirical ground. In the first place, he characterised traditional Chinese society as a heterogeneous society with obvious internal differentiations in terms of local people’s class, status and power. However, he maintained that Chinese lineage organisation had the extraordinary powerful function to integrate this heterogeneous society into one cohesive structural whole. Economically, agnatic corporation among members of descent groups over ancestral estates served to keep local people in their villages through the sharing of communal goods and wealth:

“The essential feature of land tenure in Fukien and Kawangtung was the important role ascribed to the corporate holdings of lineages and their segments. ... [T]he surplus economy of the region, mediated by the institution of collective ownership, created a fund of property which tended to keep lineage members at home. ... It may be true that in the popular sense the poor were exploited by the rich; but even as they were exploited they enjoyed privileges important enough to make their

extinction” (1967, p. xiv-xv)

continued residence worth-while.” (1958, p. 127)

Culturally, the incorporation of people with varying social statuses within the descent groups allows Chinese people to derive honours and prestige from their powerful kinsmen:

“Carried to its full extent differentiation in status retained within the community men whose social position as scholars and bureaucrats conferred prestige and power upon their lineage as a whole. Not only, therefore, could the lineage accumulate tangible property in which the humbler men shared to some extent, but it might also build up a collective reputation for learning and gentility which was in fact based on the activities of very few members but which spread its light over all the others.” (1958, p. 130)

In the political sphere, similar principles of sharing formed a source of important protection and even an advantage for the people:

“There were legal and political benefits to be derived from remaining a lowly member of a powerful lineage. ... If in the conduct of lawsuits and administrative and fiscal matters the lineage could be spoken for by gentlemen, then the peasant enjoyed a protection and advantage which he was not likely to want to forgo. ... It was better to be a fish in a big than a little fish in a small pond.” (1958, p. 130)

In essence, Freedman not only related the notion of a traditional Chinese society in the New Territories to most ancient Chinese institutions and practices in their authentic form, but he also drew upon a typical structural-functionalist interpretation to

construct the concept of lineage organisation as an ultimate centripetal force in the formation of traditional Chinese society.

Throughout many later literatures and researches, Freedman's anthropological account of traditional Chinese society has been taken authoritatively as a powerful paradigm and widely adopted. For instance, Hugh Baker (1966) quoted Freedman's Chinese lineage studies in his discussions of the localised lineages in the New Territories. By drawing on local documents and genealogical information, he supported Freedman's argument of the wide spread of large-scale lineage organisation in South-eastern China through his monograph of the five great clans of the New Territories.² In his intensive ethnographic study of a village in Sheung Shui, northern New Territories, he used almost the same structural functional approach as Freedman for his scrutiny of the specific development of the Liaos lineage in this village (Baker, 1968).³ Moreover, he reinforced Freedman's argument of the central importance of

² In addition to Baker's monograph, Xiao (1990) has produced a similar study but written in Chinese regarding the history of the five great clans of the New Territories. Sung (1973 & 1974) has worked on the same topic as well but concentrated on the Dengs clan, the largest of these. In effect, their anthropological or historical works with Freedman's original theoretical claims have for long induced a strong impression of the existence of large-scale lineage organisation as a common feature in the New Territories and those large-scale lineage organisations there as, in Baker's term, "true-to-type" (1966, p. 25).

³ Baker used Freedman's structural functional approach for his own Chinese lineage studies not only in this work developed from his doctoral thesis, but also in his earlier work which claimed to discern the differences between single-clan and multiple-clan villages. However, in this earlier work (1964) he provided few original ideas or specific ethnographic information but mainly clarified analytical terms with some elaborations of Freedman's interpretation of the segmentary growth of Chinese lineage and Freedman's key ideas in his A to Z continuum concerning the degree of development of Chinese lineages.

Chinese lineage organisations in holding the society together and took special note of how it had occurred in the past before the impact of modern forces, as follows:

“The importance of the kinship-ritual aspect which overlies the community aspect in the lineage village is its unifying power. A lineage community is able to act as an undivided unit vis-à-vis the outside world; it can throw its full strength into offence, defence or public works; it can build up and invest capital (mainly in land) without internal dissension; it can command its members without fear of refusal ... but it apparently cannot compete effectively against an urban economy which offers its members a greatly enhanced standard of material prosperity.” (1968, p. 214)

Jack Potter likewise employed Freedman’s structural functional approach in his research on Chinese lineage institutions in the New Territories. By focusing on agnatic corporation over ancestral estate and viewing the subject matter in wholesale economic terms, he utilised his fieldwork findings from the Pang Shan Tang in the New Territories to sustain Freedman’s claim for the role of the ancestral estate as a source of solidarity in the formation of lineage society, writing:

“There were, of course, lineages in China that owned little or no collective property, but these were lineages in name only Collective property basically financed the building of ancestral halls and supported ancestor worship; most important, however, was the role of ancestral estates in attracting lineage members for economic reasons and in maintaining lineage solidarity.” (1970, p. 127-128)

“[M]y study of the changes that have taken in the Tang Lineage of Ping Shan in recent years strongly suggests that the common property of the ancestral estates was the only factor preventing the disintegration of the group in the modern social and economic context. ... Without the economic

attraction of the ancestral land, the Tangs lineage would soon cease to be socially important.” (ibid, p. 129-130)

On the other hand, James Watson extended Freedman’s analysis to his study of the emigration of the Mans villagers in San Tin from the New Territories to the United Kingdom and other European countries. In this regard, he not only kept the economic explanation of the central importance of lineage in Chinese life and society, but also maintained Freedman’s view of the protective nature of Chinese lineage organisation for its people as follows:

“[T]he lineage was the most effective unit of protection in a hostile social environment. ... Powerful lineages gave their members economic advantages that most peasants in Southern China did not enjoy.” (1975, p. 203)

“[T]he lineage serves as an important security mechanism for the Man emigrants. The uncertain nature of emigrant work in alien cultures reinforces the need for a secure and significant group at home.” (ibid, p. 207)

These studies of Chinese lineage organisation with their structural functional interpretations, now seem entirely outdated, along with the whole structural functional paradigm established by Talcott Parsons. C. Wright Mills described the approach as “drunk on syntax, blind to semantics” (1959, p. 34). This way of making sense of human society was merely to play with the logic the functionalist themselves had

created within grand narratives, and frequently dismissed the meanings, variances, ironies or contradictions in social reality, preferring their textual construction of human society. Despite this critical poverty of structural functional paradigm inherent in Freedman's Chinese lineage studies, Freedman's general characterisation of the New Territories under British colonial rule as the "best living example" of traditional Chinese society has become a taken-for-granted reference and starting point for many other researches in and about the New Territories by various social scientists, not only as regards to the matters of lineage, agnatic corporation or kinship bond and the like.

Marjorie Topley, for example, in the same vein as Freedman, suggested that the New Territories was a rare place where, "many of the traditional patterns are still largely preserved" (Topley, 1964, p. i). James Hayes⁴ drew on his ethnographic studies to maintain Freedman's forceful views with respect to research concerning authentic Chinese tradition in the field of New Territories as follows:

"Despite sweeping material, social, and political changes, essential elements of the old culture remain... ." (2001, p. 72)

Potter in another his studies, even extensively broadens Freedman's idea into the

⁴ Hayes' ethnographic studies regarding the locality of the New Territories, the little local island communities in particular, are so many that it is out of the scope of this chapter to examine them one by one. Nevertheless, I will discuss the general importance of his works for the study of the New Territories in the next section. For a selected bibliography of his important works see the Reference section of the present thesis.

following much expanded elaboration:

“Rural Chinese society in the New Territories is of intrinsic interest in its own right... . The New Territories is also of great interest to students of China because it is one of the few remaining places where traditional Chinese village and town still exist in a state approximating their traditional pre-Communist forms.”(1969, p. 3)

“The great value of the Colony as a social laboratory is that it contains almost all the elements in the traditional society – from lineages, villages, and market town to urban and social economic organisations of all kinds. Not only is it possible to study each of these social institution separately, it is also possible to study their interrelationship as parts of a total on-going system.” (1969, p. 4)

“[W]ith the disappearance of the traditional rural culture in the New Territories there will be no remnants of traditional rural China left anywhere... .” (ibid, p. 28)

In accordance with Potter’s narrative terms, categories and concepts and deriving the general characterisation from Freedman, Ronald Ng provides a detail ethnographic account of a Hakka community in Tung Chun, New Territories and sums up his position as follows:

“In as many ways as one can imagine, this Hakka Community of the Tung Chung represents one that belongs to bygone days. Indeed, the community can be said to have a ‘fossil’ form of life; so basic is its outlook and so superstitious are its beliefs. Tucked in a remote corner of the Colony, ... Tung Chun retains much of its original characteristics, its charm and peacefulness.” (1969, p. 63)

To bring out this early writing developed around Freedman's authority in the field of New Territories and the general discussion of Chinese village communities, my purpose here is not simply to flog a dead horse. For one matter, the theoretical and conceptual legacies left from these early literatures still flourish in many areas. Their viewpoints have become a long-lasting orthodox interpretation of the Chinese communities in the New Territories. In the same way, the notion of the five great clans of the New Territories, pointing to the general proposition of the wide spread of large-scale and true-to-type lineage organisation in the New Territories, has become accepted in the standard textbook for secondary school students.⁵ In academic literature, popular readings and travels alike, it is still common to characterise the village communities in the New Territories as a traditional place where many ancient Chinese customs, practices and heritage in their authentic forms remain.⁶

At another level, it is of capital importance to fully recognize that the endurance of this conceptual characterisation of the Chinese village communities in the New Territories is not also a long lasting political fallacy in the practice of scholarship. Among the existing academic discussions, the following discourse on the New Territories of the anthropologist Hunag Shu-man may be an extreme one. However,

⁵ See Ka, N. Y. Y. (2001, Chap. 2).

⁶ For example, Qiu, D. (1999); Hayes, J. (2001); Chen, R. Z. (2001); Rao, J. C. (2001); Zheng, C. J. & Zhang, Z. J. (2002); Lim, P. (2002).

his discourse clearly highlights why the critical issue here is not simply a matter of an academic cliché. Rather, it is the issue of the close complicity of scholastic Sinology with British colonialism and the normalising consequence of both:

“In fact, we should probably credit this ‘enlightened colonialism’ as the only reason why traditional Chinese kinship organization land tenure system, and beliefs have been preserved in their authentic forms. ... The presence of British rule, with its high efficiency and legalistic interpretation of traditional customs and laws, has as H. G. H. Nelson (1969)⁷ puts it, literally ‘fossilised’ Chinese society in the New Territories. I would contend that they have not only been fossilised, but also been pushed to their ‘pure’ and ‘ideal’ manner.” (1982, p. 66)

It is perverse to take the Chinese people’s living communities as a temporal other from immemorial past by ethnographic conceptual categories and devices for the notion of traditional Chinese society or, in Johannes Fabian’s terms, to make them into our object by “temporisation of space” (1983). It is also particularly egregious to do so in the field of the colonial New Territories. No matter if these historians or anthropologists were politically naïve or insensitive, their studies and literatures were all too easily available to be used to justify, and thus to be implicated with, the colonial notion of indirect rule which the British used to dominate the New Territories. This policy of indirect rule legitimised British rule in terms of non-intervention with local

⁷ Huang’s reading of Nelson’s work for the study of the New Territories under British colonial rule by and large is over-superficial, almost totally mistaking Nelson’s main theme. In fact, Nelson’s has produced an extremely remarkable discussion of the New Territories with many rather sophisticated

Chinese society and preservation of the indigenous people's own values, customs and traditions.⁸

II. Beyond the complex of Chinese tradition: new themes and new canons

Nevertheless, I am not arguing that the early Sinological literature made no contribution to the study of New Territories and the general discussion of Chinese village communities. Nor is it my point that it is intrinsically problematic in both the intellectual and political senses to discuss lineage organisations, corporate descent groups with communal property, ancestor worship and collective ceremonies and the like as research issues and/or conceptual categories in the study of Chinese village communities. All these matters are of real consequence to the local people and may even have a remarkable history in their social and cultural practices. The intellectual efforts made by these early writers certainly helped to open up the whole field of analysis and draw out essential research dimensions.

However, to name something as “traditional”, as I have briefly mentioned in Introduction, frequently blinds us to the way specific human institutions and behaviours vary synchronically with remarkable fuzziness in practice. They also

insights, and I will make a closer review of his work in the following section.

⁸ For details please refer to Chapter 1.

change diachronically, and have different importance in different times and at different places. These early writings have also provided us with numerous materials, essential case studies and remarkable empirical analysis that clearly recognized the varying features and changing circumstances of Chinese village communities throughout their detail ethnographic accounts or historical narratives.

For instance, Freedman (1962) confronted the obvious geographical variations in the practice of Chinese lineage organisation in his second set of studies of Chinese lineage organisation. Baker (1979) discussed the fluidity of Chinese kinship practices beyond the general structural order of Chinese lineage organisation by extending his investigations into the domestic cycle of Chinese family initiated by Myron Cohen (1970 & 1976). Potter in his earlier study (1968) had produced an extremely heuristic account of how the Chinese communities in the New Territories engaged with the overwhelming capitalistic practices and integrated with the general market economy of Hong Kong. Watson in his later work (1982) re-considered the significance of lineage organisation in China and made evident numerous important complexities in the formation of Chinese lineage organisation in practice. Topley (1968) had substantially shown how the constitution of rural cohesion in Chinese communities could come about through different local religious beliefs and common practices, not

just ancestral worship within lineage organisations. Throughout Hayes' various monographs about the New Territories, he concretely indicated that lineage organisations in the New Territories are not necessarily large-scale but instead exist at different scales and have intricate interplay with the outside world in different ways (1962, 1963, 1964a & 1983). His studies of the historical formation of a multiple-lineage village in Lantau Island (1964b) even mentioned how the developmental project by British colonial rule removed a long-established community from its original residence to the modern flats in a new town – an obvious example of the inconsistency of British colonial rule with their official claim to political non-interventionism in their governance of the New Territories.

However, these writers adhered to a general theoretical notion of traditional Chinese society, and sought universal patterns and unchanging reality. Although they acknowledged that this society varied from place to place and over time, their failure to build these insights into their general theory reduced the importance of their ethnographic and historical findings. Too often they resorted to characterising New Territories Chinese society as “traditional”. Their attempts to make sense of the Chinese village communities through the notion of ‘Chinese tradition’ ironically turned out to make no substantial sense of the specific local realities they described for

a particular point in time.

Thus, I accept that the issue of Chinese lineage organisation or other enduring Chinese practices in the New Territories is a significant issue for further research. However, it is imperative to account for their *ongoing effects* on people's sense of community order and relationships instead of indiscriminately freezing their implications in a single point of time for analytical convenience or simply sorting out the structural order as if it is the be-all and end-all. Some writers have already contributed in these ways.

For example, Burton Pasternak (1972) carried out comparative case studies of the two multi-surname villages Tatieh and Chungshe in Taiwan and illuminated how Chinese communities constantly exist with two contradictory forces among its people: "cooperative and aggregative" on the one hand and "self-regarding and segmentary" on the other. In effect, the existence of lineage organisation in a locality is not an all-powerful embracing force sufficient to bond the local community into one cohesive whole. Instead, lineage organisations are frequently used in two different ways. Local people select different elements from them for their specific needs and interests in their local circumstances. Interestingly, in Tatieh, Pasternak even observed that the social cohesion in this village came chiefly and historically through various cross-kin

associations that collectively played down the differences in kinship, class and ethnicity among its people. On the contrary, in the case of Chungshe, he revealed that the dominant descent group in this village was deeply affected by its internal differentiations linked to wealth, residence and agnatic segmentation and showed how these cleavages were extended to include the wider community. Taking the two cases together, he developed an alternative image of the Chinese village as follows:

“A Chinese community is like a polyphony; its character depends on which voice conveys the theme. Other voices need not be silenced, however, and any of them may, when its time comes, rise to dominance.”
(1972, p. 159)

Pasternak’s conceptual insights are equally applicable to the study of Chinese family life in local households, not just to the general community life. As Cohen observed, the same pair of contradictory forces by and large structure the practice of Chinese family life as well:

“All Chinese families were under a constant tension produced by the conflict between unifying forces and those making for fragmentation.”
(1976, p. 231)

Beyond this important argument of the dialectical process in the formation of Chinese families, Cohen’s close analysis of the domestic dynamic of Chinese family in his village study showed how Chinese families are generally nested into a hierarchal

lineage order but that the actual practices in Chinese family are not necessarily identical to that order. By the same token, the actual family relationships among people are not simply structurally determined but instead fundamentally varied and intricately subjected to the actor-participants' local negotiations and actions among and for themselves. He stated this important point as follows:

“A given relationship can involve dominance, submission, unity, division, solidarity, or competition; through time such qualities can replace each other as the main element in a given relationship, and at any given point in time some or all of these qualities may variously characterize the different specific relationships that make up the total network of intrafamilial ties.” (1976, p. 193-194)

At a more general conceptual level, in her case study of the Tengs lineage organisation in Ha Tusan, New Territories Ruby Watson demonstrated that it is misleading to follow the common imagery of the past Chinese society as a “lineage society”.

Furthermore, “lineages” themselves are not monolithic:

“According to available historical research, lineages... have not been part of Chinese society since time immemorial, nor was China a “lineage society” in the sense that local organisation was necessarily, or even usually, lineage-based.” (1985, p. 18)

Through more detailed analysis of localities, and by situating them in their historical contexts, she revealed that the rise of lineage society was not complete:

“The creation of Teng lineage at Ha Tsuen does not fit the scenario outlined

by Freedman. In the case considered here, common descent and common residence long predated the foundation of a unified lineage. Only after three centuries of settlement did large numbers of Tengs householders unite to form a corporate descent group.” (ibid, p. 14)

Most importantly, she argued that Chinese lineage organisation had never been a ‘natural outgrowth’ of the system of patrilineal descent or, rather, a totally self-generating and self-referential body. On the contrary, it was contingently established by local people in a specific moment and historically developed in response to broader political and economic circumstances, and rose and fell on numerous occasions:

“Obviously there are significant differences between the Chinese lineage and the kind descent model seeks to represent. While sinological anthropologists have sometimes pointed out these differences, they have tended to ignore the dynamic relationships between the system of descent and the wider system of social and economic inequality.” (ibid, p. 172)

“However, if we remember that the Chinese lineage existed in a class-based society with a complex state and religious systems, we begin to see that lineage did not dominate but was dominated by these wider social forms. The important question becomes not how lineage operates but how it relates to this wider system.” (ibid, p. 173).

To re-think the subject matter of Chinese lineage organisation from this position, she described how the development of lineage organisation frequently accompanied the elaboration of class differences among its people. She found that, despite its hegemonic claim to fraternalism as its general constitutional principle, the existence of

lineage organisation in practice seldom achieved equality among its agnatic members.

In many contexts, on the contrary, it worked to provide more advantages to those already privileged than to the rest of the membership:

“The Chinese lineage was not an institution dedicated to the pursuit of mutual advantage with all members sharing equally in the benefits or profits.” (ibid, p. 168)

“In fact, the patrilineage, along with affinity, played an important role in maintaining a system of class privilege in the Chinese countryside.” (ibid, p. 173-174)

Through a comprehensive historical investigation into the developments of different Chinese lineages in different village communities, David Faure (1986) also suggested that lineage organisation frequently means different things to different groups and people. In particular, he insightfully conceptualised how some lineage members might actually obtain valuable benefits from their collective ancestral estate while others might merely acquire a right to settlement in the village that was under the territorial control of their lineage organisation. Nonetheless, Faure observed on the other hand that many village communities possessed numerous collective social and cultural practices for the well-being of their communal life and therefore developed specific social structures in their common territory over and beyond their general lineage organisation. Accordingly, he argued that the substantial constitution of

Chinese community, even in the case of single-surname villages, is grounded more on the common right to settlement for its people and the collective activities related to it rather than the shared business around ancestral cults and estates:

“[C]ommunal life cuts across lineage lines.”(1985, p. 96)

“The term ‘lineage village’ frequently used to designate single-surname villages should not be taken to imply that the lineage is the sole mode of organisation within these villages.” (ibid, p. 99)

“Real lineage society did not depend on ornate ancestral halls.” (ibid, p. 165)

More recently, Allen Chun (1985, 1996 & 2000) distinguished the numerous subtle but significant nuances in the practice of Chinese lineage and the vexing relationships between lineage and village in the making of local communities. Based on his cultural analysis of the changing meanings of different local terms in different linguistic and symbolic contexts, Chun in the first place found that lineage is only one of many cultural sources which local people flexibly use to maintain their household and community life at their convenience. Although it frequently co-exists with village organisation in a particular locality, it entails no necessary or straightforward relationship with village organisation and is even largely irrelevant to much of the practice of village life. In general, Chun pointed out that lineage is not a structure,

much less the core of Chinese society, but a group of flexible cultural concepts which in practice have had various discursive and ideological impacts on people and indeterminate areas. These impacts have been subject to the different interpretations and negotiations in term of the specific needs and political interests of individual agents. A substantial understanding of lineages and their common but entirely contingent relationships with village communities has to be discovered from specific contexts and by taking the native point of view as central:

“I for one do not believe that there is a “structure” of Chinese society from time immemorial that contributes to the stability of local social organisation” (2000, p. 310)

“Lineage organisation and territorial exclusivity ... had to be the consequence of factors traceable ultimately to the complex interplay between ideological discourse, local politics and their embeddedness in the wider practice and constitution of the polity.” (ibid, p. 310)

“[L]ineage and village are two distinct constellations that have by force of historical dynamics come together and mutually reinforced each other. ... [T]he formation of a territorial community can adopt as its recruitment criteria any number of factors, agnation being only one, which should follow from a native definition of what a village, instead of agnation per se, is.” (ibid, p. 311)

At one level these studies have pinpointed the conceptual necessity to look carefully for the ambivalent complexities and temporal specificities of local practices in Chinese communities. At another level, these studies have commonly identified the

analytical need for a fundamentally relational approach that views these Chinese communities as fluid and flexible, intricately linked to and interactive with broader contexts. These studies have demonstrated that even when a Chinese community exists within an overall lineage organisation we still need to discern the specific moment when and the actual extent to which the lineage organisation is of relevance or irrelevance to the practice of household and community life instead of taking it as an unproblematic universal fact and using it as a thematic theoretical thread to make sense of everything in the locality of Chinese communities. Furthermore, we should take it as a dynamic terrain of contestation among different agents and account for the ways in which different agents contingently maintain it in specific context but it in effect means different things to them with different impacts on them. We should also recognize other working perspectives and important practices, thereby draw on them to examine the remarkable continuity and viability of Chinese community at the ground level.

In this regard, my theoretical discussion in this chapter cannot end here. In this thesis, I am not considering other Chinese regions but must situate these processes in the peculiar colonial encounter between British rule and the indigenous Chinese population in the New Territories. To reach a more pertinent theoretical framework for

the study of this particular case, in its peculiar historical and geographical context, I now must highlight some essential issues of how British colonial rule engaged with its colonial subjects and how it impacted on the local society in the New Territories.

III. The *realpolitik* of colonial rule and its impact upon local practices

British colonial domination of other countries in contemporary history has consisted of two apparently contradictory features. One was their claim to have a ‘civilizing mission’ to introduce modern values and institutions to the rest of the world.⁹ The other was the policy of ‘indirect rule’, which was rule over its colonies by maintaining and adapting the existing indigenous laws and traditions.¹⁰ Colonial studies however contend that neither of these policies was in fact fully implemented nor did this picture truthfully represent the actual political interests of colonial rule. In practice, the first political priority of the colonial rulers was to create the conditions of their rule in their colonies or, rather, to make the colonised group governable. As Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh pointed out,

“Colonial rulers were primarily concerned with creating and maintaining the basic conditions of their rule. Since they justified their rule in civilisational terms they needed to introduce some of European values and institutions. However, the continuity of colonial rule required the prevailing values and institutions should not be too much disturbed, and

⁹ For details see Ashish Nandy (1983).

¹⁰ For details see Bernard Cohn (1996).

that modern values, which were ultimately subversive of colonial rule, should be introduced partially and half-heartedly. This means that colonial rule both introduced and arrested the flow of new values and institutions, and also that it both changed and froze their traditional counterparts. To say that it only subverted or froze the precolonial society is to be guilty of half-truths.” (1995, p. 2)

Nevertheless, there were indications that British colonial rule in practice was by no means monolithic and omnipotent. On the contrary, political expediency and indeterminacy frequently characterised their rule. By drawing on the history of land law in Indian society under British colonialism, David Washbrook showed how the continuity of colonial rule has always needed to make numerous wanted or unwanted compromises with various old or new local forces at different times. Washbrook argued that:

“There appeared to be room for accommodation.... All could live together, in some kind of harmony, without contending the bases of one another’s social existence. The hope of this harmony, and balance, was fully expressed in the law. The apparent confusions and contradictions in its theories and procedures served to make it an instrument of compromise.” (1981, p. 693)

As far as the other side of the coin is concerned, Bernard Cohn in his Indian studies (1987) illuminated that the colonised people in the same way saw many expected or unexpected changes in their world as they lived with the shifting colonial

circumstances and engaged them through their own perspectives and actions:

“In the historical situation of colonialism, both white rules and indigenous peoples were constantly involved in representing to each other what they were doing. Whites everywhere come into other peoples’ world with models and logics, means of representation, forms of knowledge and action, with which they adapted to the construction of new environments, peopled by new ‘other’. By the same token, these ‘other’ had to restructure their worlds to encompass the fact of white domination and their own powerlessness.” (1987, p. 44)

These intricate processes were also played out in the New Territories of Hong Kong. By reflecting upon the British colonial legislations and administration regarding the issue of land, Howard Nelson (1969) countered the British colonial claim to be following a policy of indirect rule, in which their governance respected and effectively preserved the indigenous Chinese people’s traditions and customs in the New Territories. At the legislative level, Nelson revealed that colonial rule had not simply codified Chinese law and custom into a more strict and rigid fashion than what had existed before in China, but they had also introduced new legal terms, categories and requirements through which people had to negotiate over their land with new local courts. At the administrative level, Nelson observed that colonial rulers kept intensifying their bureaucratic control of land in a much more forceful and systemic manner than what the previous Chinese government had done. The British undertook

official surveys, produced land records and cadastral maps, required Chinese people to register their land, issued new official deeds to landowners, narrowed people's right to land, introduced new land policies and even abolished existing local practices thought to be incompatible with their ruling system.

Above all, Nelson argued that British colonial rule in the New Territories by and large superimposed on land a legislative and bureaucratic order foreign to the local people. Their codification of Chinese law and custom with their increasingly efficient administrative control of land under their so-called indirect rule in effect played down many existing flexible arrangements, negotiable areas, self-autonomies and informal local conventions or obligations the Chinese people had normally held in the past. However, the colonised people also turned out to frequently invoke the notion of Chinese tradition as a token for their political and economic bargaining with colonial rule. Increasingly they adopted the legislative and bureaucratic systems established by colonial rule to make good their claims to land, a new local Chinese practice with which created numerous vexing conflicts and disputes not only between colonial rule and people at the general socio-political level, but also among the local people at domestic and community levels. As Chun also pointed out,

“To claim, as the government did repeatedly, that it modified customary practice ‘on the ground’ as a means of preserving intact in the long run its traditional essence as a system of law grossly understates the nature of

radical change that took place. ...The (colonial) government created a system of legal codes and regulations which not only imperfectly mirrored existing customs but in long term practice managed through bureaucratic efficiency to build these imperfections into the system.” (1990, p. 417-418)

Furthermore, Chun not only described the critical poverty of colonial legality and bureaucracy in their attempt to manage Chinese tradition and custom, but he also drew on various new cases and less-known local histories to make it rather clear how colonial rule often justified its forceful interventions on the grounds of rationalizing the land tenure in the New Territories to suit their own purposes. Chun wrote:

“Far from having rationalized in customary terms... as British claimed, it more accurately rationalised the system according to their own values, rules and requirements and not according to custom, the end result being, of course, the abolition of that custom.” (2000, p. 69)

Most importantly, Chun argued that existing “Chinese tradition and custom” in the New Territories was actually mixed with colonial modifications and even inventions. This not just inevitably transformed the local Chinese communities but also profoundly jeopardized their development in their own rights:

“British colonial land policy through its machinery of administrative efficiency introduced subtle changes into system and petrified the existing ‘order’ (as artificially constructed) in a way which eventually came to be confused for native tradition. It is this continuing illusion of an unchanging ‘tradition’ perpetrated by administrators and scholars alike that has masked a set of increasing unnatural developments on the land.” (1990, p. 402)

“The (colonial) need to delineate relationship of ‘descent’, ‘estate’, and ‘dominion’ as a means of understanding ‘kinship’, ‘ownership’ and ‘territoriality’ in a Chinese context was more than just a politically passive or ‘objective’ regime of knowledge, and in the long run this attempt to ‘rationalize’ society in terms of relationships constituted a serious threat to the fabric of local society as indigenously conceived.” (ibid, p. 417)

In particular, Chun showed how the original meaning of land and the people’s everyday practices in the New Territories were changed and even destroyed as a consequence of the colonial encounter. He observed that land in the Chinese context had historically entailed many essential social and cultural meanings and represented not just a “material livelihood”, but also “a socially valued livelihood”, “a right to live” and “a kind of social rootedness”. However, throughout colonial rule the British extensively took over Chinese peoples’ land for urban and industrial development, thereby fundamentally detaching the people from their land and undermining an essential domain on which the well-being of their household livelihood and communal life was grounded. Most critically, colonial rule merely took the value of land at wholesale economic prices as the basis of the compensation they paid for land expropriations. The New Territories people also began to internalise this attitude towards their land as they increasingly were forced to engage in land deals with the colonial rulers. Chun argued that the rise of colonial rule in the New Territories

impinged on the material security of local communities and removed many meanings of land in Chinese people's practices:

"In the context of the New Territories, the impact of colonial rule has been most heavily felt on the land with reference to the village community. ... The crisis was one that ultimately struck at the heart of the village community by raising anxieties and uncertainties in its existing way of life and by stripping it of its traditional moral autonomy." (2000, p. 306-307)

In a similar vein, Chiu and Hung in their political and sociological studies went beyond the taken-for-granted notion of British "indirect rule" in the New Territories and produced a colonial critique by taking a special look into two apparently contradictory features of colonial rule in the New Territories: on the one hand, rapid post-war development; on the other hand, the preservation of traditional Chinese society by indirect rule. They shared Nelson's and Chun's argument that in practice colonial rule was far from preserving Chinese society and that the practice of colonial government was not identical to the ostensible nature of indirect rule. They also found that colonial rule frequently acted as an ultimate 'moderniser' to promote the post-war development of the New Territories behind the mask of indirect rule. In the meantime, colonial rulers often extended their administrative apparatus in order to forestall or control a social crisis in the form of resistance to drastic socio-economic change in the New Territories:

“The post-war development of the New Territories in fact testified to the enduring significance of actions by the colonial state in shaping the socio-economic modernisation of the New Territories. It was far from an autonomous and natural process, the colonial state was at the core of ‘modernisation’ process, actively preventing conflicts and resistance from getting out of hand.” (1997, p. 39)

Chiu and Hung argued that colonial rule in many contexts co-opted the local elites as state agents by legitimising their vested interest in land, and that it introduced new official organisations and institutions to sustain rural stability for the economic development of the New Territories. In general, they pointed out that,

“[T]he colonial state had in fact imposed its substantial influences on rural communities and transformed their socio-economic configurations considerably since the early period of colonial rule.” (1997, p. 20)

“[S]tate action and its institutional presence, the relationship and shifting alliances between the state and the rural elite, and the social differentiation within the villages must be taken as the core of such inquiries.” (ibid, p. 53)

However, these accounts are largely silent on issues of gender. Carol Jones was one of the first to observe that the peculiar colonial encounter in the New Territories was not gender neutral; therefore New Territories studies must abandon their gender-blind biases. Through her gender-sensitive reading of colonial laws, she provides us with a deeper insight into the sociological significance of what Chun has described as the subtle but consequential colonial transformation of Chinese tradition. Specifically,

she makes evident that British colonial rule, in the name of respecting ‘Chinese tradition and custom’, frequently worked in a partial way to amplify the authority of patriarchy in the New Territories:

“The initial introduction of British law to Hong Kong resulted not in a conflict with local practices, but a reinforcement of pre-colonial forms of patriarchal power. ... The power of the male head of the household (the *paterfamilias*) over everyone within his domain was thought to provide the best guarantee of order in the family, in society, and in the Empire. The social and economic position of men and women was legally structured to preserve these arrangements.” (1996, pp. 170-171)

Her contribution also throws lights on the peculiar issue of the long rural stability of the New Territories under colonial rule, also mentioned by Chiu and Hung. In the first place, she identified the relationship between the colonising British regime and the colonised indigenous Chinese people in the New Territories as one full of mutual constitution rather than simply a one-sided and enclosed ‘dominating-dominated relationship’:

“[T]he *realpolitik* of colonialism meant that the British administration quickly become dependent upon ‘native’ cooperation (of the local Chinese elites), to secure local compliance and permit effective administration of the colony. The hegemony of the colonial government has therefore never been quite as complete as some assume.” (1996, p. 167)

In effect, the colonial policy of indirect rule maintained a form of andocentric

governance through which Chinese patriarchs and male elites were not only provided with officially recognised voices and positions, but they also actively and frequently utilised them to increase their general status:

“[I]n the name of cultural sensitivity, whenever an issue of custom has arisen, advice has been sought on the proper interpretation of Chinese law from a small number of expatriate and local ‘China experts’ – all of them male, all of them adamantly patriarchal, and all of them competing to be the authentic ‘voice’ of the local population. The differences of the Chinese were further emphasised by Chinese elites themselves, as they sought to develop their own power-base and identity in colonial society.” (1996, p. 169)

Jones found that, by contrast, Chinese women suffered from ‘a system of settled inequalities and continued discrimination’ (ibid, p. 173). Moreover, of the prevailing patriarchal values and practices shared by both British colonisers and the Chinese patriarchs, the most extreme were features like paternal domestic rule, patrilineal succession of family land and property, and male-only participatory right to communal affairs and decisions. In these matters, Chinese women were always deprived of their rights in society. Jones took the concept of ‘conditional fatalism’ from Lockwood and used it to articulate the particular existential situation of Chinese women:

“Lacking of control over one’s life is a common experiences of colonised people deprived of a political voice. ... [T]he experience of Hong Kong women parallels the experiences of Hong Kong people generally.” (1996, p. 189)

Building on a similar gender-specific study of the New Territories but turning the subject matter inside out by a bottom-up analysis, Selina Chan (1997) juxtaposed her important ethnographic discussion to the contrary with Jones' final remark on the local gender situation in the New Territories. Chan thereby provided with us a new analytical point of departure for research on the New Territories. By investigating a land dispute between two village women and the interventions of others into their case, Chan observed that local women and men alike are active speakers of the notion of Chinese tradition in their own themes. Local negotiations, flexible arrangements, rooms for manoeuvre and moral obligations for their well-being still exist. Some of village men and women's own interpretations of the notion of Chinese tradition and its related local politics as played out by them might even fundamentally subvert the official line that, at least in part, defined it in strong patriarchal terms. To highlight this important alternative point of view, Chan also drew on direct ethnographic references to indicate how the patrilineal principle in the sharing of ancestral good in her case has had no effect except as an ideology, whilst the villagers have commonly but deliberately circumvented that legally-cum-culturally normalized principle to benefit their male and female descendants alike, according to their own justice:

“[T]he legal aspect – the New Territories Ordinance – is in daily conversation widely invoked by villagers in support of their interpretation of tradition. It is not uncommon to hear villagers saying, ‘this is our

tradition, not giving women a piece of land.” (1997, p. 167)

“Indeed, not giving land and housing to daughters, conforms to customary practices as codified by the legal order. Nevertheless, conformity is now only formal, and not substantial.... Today it is not uncommon to hear villagers in their mid-50s and younger saying that: father could deliberately sell their land or house first. The property is thereby converted into cash, and, thus, daughter may legitimately receive the cash. So daughters are able to obtain a considerable amount, equal or similar to that received by a son.” (ibid, p. 168-169)

IV. Research framework, focus and questions

Following these important studies on British colonialism, I think that any study of the Chinese communities in the New Territories has to be fully aware of the consequences of colonial impact for the population. Specifically, one cannot presume that colonial dominance was maintained through ‘indirect rule’. The actual socio-political relationships between colonial rule and Chinese communities or, in other words, the meanings of the colonial encounter in the New Territories also have to be fundamentally re-examined with certain new propositions and key conceptual axes as follows:

- 1) British colonial rule did not simply keep the *status quo* of the New Territories but instead made overwhelming interventions into the locality in creating and maintaining the conditions for its rule.
- 2) In these circumstances, the Chinese village communities, their usual order and practices, have seen numerous consequential cultural,

economic and social changes. Some of them were subtle and elusive while yet some of them were obvious and drastic.

- 3) The continuity of 'Chinese tradition' authorised by the British colonial rule strengthened the persistence of patriarchal power in the local community with renewed legal and administrative recognition of their status and privileges. In effect, there appeared a symbiotic relationship between British coloniser and Chinese patriarch to govern the local people.
- 4) Critically, the presence of such a patriarchal-cum-colonial ruling structure in the New Territories had multiple adverse effects upon local Chinese women and deprived them of political voice and undermined their essential interests.
- 5) However, local contestations continued in practice. Fundamental ruptures of the official patriarchal colonial order, different positions and actions kept occurring. Not only men, but also women are active agents and both have their remarkable strength in shaping and re-shaping the everyday order for and among themselves.

By drawing on a new village case and concentrating on the critical patriarchal colonial impacts on gender, this thesis attempts to contribute to this new theoretical discourse for the study of the Chinese communities in the New Territories under British colonial rule. In particular, my research follows Chan's bottom-up approach, which has not only usefully modified Jones' over-sentimental and totally visionless view concerning the existential situation of women, but also initially set out a more fruitful direction for gender research in the study of colonial New Territories, one that recognizes the

practical complexity and indeterminacy at the village level. Of course, it is also not new to say that Chinese gender relationships are full of local variations and negotiations in practice and that Chinese women are not a singular dependent category or a passive victim of male domination. Despite this recognition, however, these viewpoints remain less well documented in the field of New Territories, with the exception of Chan's analysis. There is also a widely-held view that, by and large, Chinese women possess diversified and flexible positions in society and that these positions are not determined by patriarchal institutions. For example, Delia Davin's (1976) studies on women in Mainland China pointed out the need to consider the differential female positions which in practice endowed Chinese women with different roles and a different extent of influences in patriarchal family institutions at different stages of their life cycle:

"In talking of 'position of women in society' one is using a convenient shorthand for a complex and highly variable reality. To access it we must consider such factors as the way in which boys and girls (or men and women) are valued by their family society, the control which women are able exercise over their own lives and those of other, and conversely the extent to which their lives are controlled by others." (1976, p. 3)

More specifically, Arthur Wolf's (1975) field studies, of marriage patterns and women's lives in Chinese households, revealed numerous significant local deviations

from the norm. Wolf summed up his position as follows:

“[I]n at least one area of the country, exception were the rule. ... I suspect that the uniformity of women’s lives is an illusion. ... The reality appears to be both more complex and a great deal more interesting.” (1975, p. 90)

“My guess is that many institutions that were deviant from the elite point of view were female creations.” (ibid, p. 110)

Margery Wolf’s (1972) direct account of Chinese village women in Taiwan provided an ethnographic illustration of how the prevailing paternal rule and exogamous patrilocality from the outset made Chinese women disadvantaged and transitory members in both their natal and conjugal families. They could eventually obtain authority through bearing and mothering children to the extent of developing a ‘uterine family’ based on emotional ties with her children—a woman-centred household within but beyond the domestic patriarchal order. Accordingly, she wrote that,

“She [Chinese woman] was a stranger and an outsider in her husband’s family, but her own uterine family was composed of children who valued her praise, her affection, and her support of them over all others, including that of their father.” (1985, p. 9)

Ellen Judd’s (1994) observation of rural Chinese women in three villages in northern China identified various less well known social and economic roles played by women. She found that women still managed to develop a clear sense of themselves as

autonomous actors in their daily existence despite having no role in the gender-blind official discourse:

“Women in these village with whom I was in frequent discussion showed a definite pattern in how they present themselves as agents. In the majority of contexts in which they talked about their actions and decisions, they spontaneously referred to themselves ... as autonomous actors. There was no doubt that in the tightly knit context of a Chinese village, other persons were also being taken into account, but they conveyed no sense of passivity in the course of ordinary conversation.” (1994, p. 222)

Above and beyond this local and domestic level, existing gender studies of Chinese people have claimed that women could contest the dominant hegemonic order with their reflexive agency. On specific historical occasions, they could even become an essential force for various social and political movements. For example, Gail Hershatter (1993) produced a historical account of Chinese women's voices. Combining the theoretical position and debates developed from Indian subaltern studies with her historical writing, she throws light on how Chinese women in fact have frequently spoken out against the elitist discourse of their times. Similarly, Elisabeth Croll (1995) undertook a bottom-up analysis of the changing identities of Chinese women under the contemporary Communist regime in Mainland China. She found that both the past patriarchal cultural rhetoric and the present political correct language are put into question by Chinese women's life experiences and their

self-perception:

“Although the deployment of rhetoric may be instrumental, its presence does not necessarily imply a single message, for slogan and everyday saying may also juxtapose messages of some incongruence, and just as these may show some variation in content so may also their utilisation. Even a hegemonic rhetoric does not exclusively serve those in authority; it can also constitute an important weapon of the weak....” (1995, p. 3)

Through a sensitive holistic approach, M. Wolf (1974) also observed how the women frequently extended their living wisdom and skills learned from their everyday experiences in their family and community to radical individual or collective participation into national social and political movements. Moreover, she found that the source of women’s active agency in this regard came from their life-long domestic struggles for daily survival:

“[W]omen in modern China are not shiny new models turned out especially for the new society. A silent, oppressed population of women did not overnight turn into an energetic, astute body politic. In fact, the family system that ignored them for so many centuries also equipped them well to participate in the revolution and the new society. They were far more experienced than their brothers at shaping opinions, sensing changes in attitude, evaluating personal advantages and disadvantages on set of circumstances.” (1974, pp. 171-172)

Bobby Siu, in his historical studies of the contemporary Chinese woman under the increasingly political and economic and political exploitation by Western imperialist

encroachment, also confirmed Wolf's views and argued that,

“Chinese women ... were *not* passive and docile beings who clung to men or did nothing more than needlework of poetry. They were and are actively engaged in the making of history... .” (1982, p. 2)

Accordingly, it should be sufficient to indicate that the subject matter of gender in Chinese localities by no means can be downplayed. Underestimation of Chinese women's self-autonomies and their influences in the formation of society is perverse. On the contrary, there are many remarkable theoretical issues and important empirical matters for one to explore and ponder. One also has every good reason to carefully appreciate how Chinese women frequently play out their different subject-effects in the practice of local life and how their individual or collective actions at different historical moments have played significant roles in the creation of consequential social changes.

On the whole, my dissertation scrutinizes Chinese communities in the colonial New Territories with an expectation that such an account could help to provide the general discussion of Chinese village life with some more context-specific references and new knowledge. To reach this research end, the present dissertation also uses the theoretical insights from these Chinese gender studies to take a special look at how Chinese women deal with the critical gender issues and act for and by themselves in

the New Territories. Specifically, the present dissertation concentrates on a set of research questions in the study of the colonial New Territories as follows:

- 1) How did Chinese people see the various overwhelming changes in their village communities? What were their struggles during the British colonial era and how did they maintain their local practices?
- 2) What are the unique features of the colonial ramification of “Chinese patriarchal institutions and practices” in the contradictory claim to preserve “Chinese tradition” in the lives men and women alike? What are their own perspectives and actions in connection with these ‘Chinese patriarchal institutions and practices’?
- 3) Is there any critical variance and fuzziness in the practice of gender by the Chinese people or, more fundamentally, what are the usual gender relationships between men and women in the daily context? How do Chinese men and women conduct themselves on the ground?
- 4) What are the different positions and complex dynamics among Chinese women? How do they individually or collectively develop their agency to engage with the prevailing patriarchal rule, and how do they shape social reality in their households and communities?
- 5) Are there any specific moments at which Chinese women had generally spoken out and struggled against the colonial history of New Territories? If so, how did they make it possible? What were their claims? How did they act and what were the end results?

These research questions are the critical tasks taken up by the following chapters. But, to start with, I will discuss the methodological approach that I adopted in the field.

Chapter 3: From participant to observer: a methodological reflection

Introduction

The research strategy I have adopted for the present study is an ethnographic investigation, joining in and living with a village community in the New Territories for differing amounts of time between November 1998 and January 2000. By adopting this research strategy, my purpose was to look into how Chinese people themselves articulated their understanding of the process in which I am interested. Accordingly, the research materials I use for the present study include my fieldnotes from the time I spent in the village, as well as other materials collected during this period from archives and newspapers.

In this chapter, I address some important methodological issues which are raised by the present study and other issues which arose during my ethnographic encounter. In the first instance there is the issue of the subject/object methodological paradigm that addresses the gulf that lies between myself as the observer, and the observed, that is, the people in the field. I then embark on a process of self-reflection examining my access to and knowledge of the field. I discuss not only my subject-position in the field, but also my relationships with my research subjects. Finally, I detail my research periods and the research methods I used.

I. “Self-other” dichotomy in fieldwork and the reflexive paradigm

Among my personal characteristics with significance for what I could research, how people responded to me, and what kinds of social events I noticed and chose to analyze, are the following. I was a young male post-graduate student, originally from Hong Kong but currently studying at one of the top universities in Britain. The focus of my research was the practice of gender by people in a village community in the New Territories, Hong Kong. With these obvious differences between them and me, the carrying out of my research inevitably entailed a *cross-age*, *cross-gender*, *cross-educational background* and even *cross-cultural* ethnographic observation and investigation. However, within the social science domain, among anthropologists and ethnographers in particular, my case surely is not unusual or unique. As Pat Caplan pointed out,

“The majority of ethnographers are separated from their subjects by nationality, race, class, education, and, in case of some, by age and sex.”
(1993, p.3)

Furthermore, a useful methodological paradigm has been established that addresses the issue of “self-other” dichotomy in the practice of fieldwork. In this regard, many researchers have generally found it necessary to transcend the common positivist view that indiscriminately accuses the embedded personal dimension in doing research as

‘personal bias’. Many writers have discussed how researchers engage themselves in the field and thereby learn to see and understand the ‘other’.¹

For instance, Martha Macintyre (1993), in her ethnographic study of the people of Tubetude Island in Papua New Guinea, reflects on the differences between herself and her subjects not only in nationality and race, but also in culture and class. However, it was through the establishment of her relationship and familiarity with her subjects during her fieldwork period that she subsequently shared various experiences with them and enabled herself to think and live in their categories. In a similar vein, Peter Wade (1993) observed that his fieldwork on black culture in Colombia was based not only on his own efforts to get close with his subjects, but his subject also worked to bond him to them through their masculine culture and fictive kinship. Importantly, he recognized the gender biases in his ethnographic fieldwork, but the boundaries of gender between himself and his female subjects in practice were not so hard and rigid; rather mutual communications between them during ethnographic encounter could come through. He wrote:

“[D]uring my fieldwork, I did not find that the ‘women’s world’ was closed off to me... This is not to say that I had the same access to it as a female

¹ For example, Abramson (1993), Amadiume (1993), Archer & Whitaker (1994), Bell, C. & Newby (1977), Bell, C. & Encel (1978), Bell, D. (1993a & 1993b), Back (1993), Cosier & Glennie (1994), Caplan (1993a & 1993b), Greertz (1973), Ganesh (1993), Golde (1970), Hammersley & Atkinson (1983), Karim (1993a & 1993b), Moore (1993), Macintyre (1993), O’ Brien (1993), Rackham & Reily (1994), Reason (1994a & 1994b), Schrijvers (1993), Traylen (1994), Treleaven (1994), Whitmore (1994), Wade (1993) and Woolgar (1988).

researcher, but it was not a realm of activity or experience that was impenetrable. I found women would talk to me about their lives, experiences and activities, and often about their relationship as well.”(1993, p.208)

Accordingly, one should have every good reason to agree with the anthropological methodological insights developed from Anthony Cohen (1994) in support of the intellectual significance of fieldwork. Namely, the ‘ethnographic self’ in the practice of fieldwork could be an authentic source of pertinent knowledge of the world as is the ‘other’, the epistemological position of which he demonstrated as follows:

“It is plainly unacceptable to assume that anthropologist and anthropologised are alike; indeed, it could be perverse, for it might risk rendering anthropology redundant. But, equally, the assumption that they are *not* alike is unacceptable for it seems to lead inexorably to the construction of their difference. It is also perverse, for it denies the pertinence of the most potent investigative and interpretive weapons in the anthropologist’s armoury: his or her own experience and consciousness.”
(1994, p.4)

In this light, I now proceed to make a similar reflection upon my fieldwork in order to confront how my personal characteristics and prior social identities affected my research. My personal account in the following sections seeks to pursue this reflexive methodological goal.

II. Personal dimension in the field

I grew up in downtown Hong Kong, and lived with my family in a sub-divided room in a small flat in an old apartment. My mother was an indigenous villager from a single-surnamed village in the New Territories. From the time that I was a child, she told me of her past experiences as a female villager. Frequently, she recounted the poor and harsh living environment in the village. She compared her rural childhood with my urban one in order to make the point that the present prosperity came from past hard struggles and the necessity of being a diligent and frugal person in making one's way in the world. Occasionally she recounted various events from the past, the history and some of the important changes that had occurred in her home village, along with her personal comments.

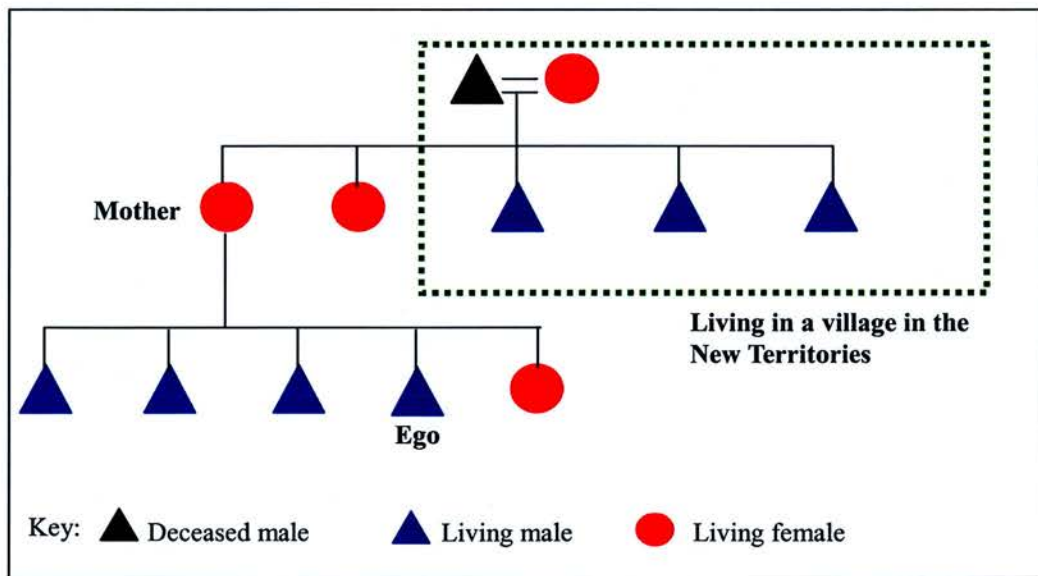
My mother told me that her deceased father was a big man in his clan. During his lifetime, the village elders and leaders designated him as a *Xun Ding* (village guard), charged with the responsibility of the day-to-day security of the village. During the chaos of wartime and the early postwar period from about the 40s to 50s, the British colonial government recognized his public position in the village and granted him a pistol in line with his duties. In addition, he was known and respected as a coach, for training the younger generation in *Kung Fu*. But, sadly, he died young from an

unknown illness when he was only forty-three years old.

As far as my mother's mother is concerned, she was an extremely hard-working woman with a tough, strong body and will. In the village, she was widely known for her tremendous physical power; even the ordinary man could not keep up with her. Unfortunately, she had suffered from a fever when she was a child that had affected her brain. Her intelligence was reduced by this accident and thereby became dull for the rest of her life. Her nickname in the village was "Ms. Fool".

My mother was never educated in school and never learned to read and write. She saw herself as 'uncultured', and had to accept the disadvantages and humiliations of her illiteracy. She was the eldest child in her family with one younger sister and three younger brothers. Under the conditions resulting from the early demise of her father, the poor intelligence of her mother, and the helplessness of her younger siblings, she became the head of the household when she was a teenager. She shouldered a wide range of family duties from doing daily chores to looking after and guiding her siblings. Her family frequently relied on her to make important decisions and to settle occasional domestic disputes as well. In 1962, when my mother was nineteen, she married a young construction worker who lived in the city of Hong Kong. Subsequently, she moved out of the village and lived with him to begin her own family (see Figure 3.1). Nevertheless, she still kept in

Figure 3.1: Personal kinship linkage to the fieldwork village



Note: information before the demise of my mother's mother in 1994

contact with her home village. Importantly, she still performed her past role in her parent's family as the chief domestic decision-maker and contributed her ideas and made arrangements for certain events. When her siblings reached a marriageable age, she initiated blind dates for them and eventually held their wedding ceremonies. In 1994, my mother's mother passed away from old age. The issue of division of the family property was raised. My mother also returned to her parent's home to manage the division, despite the fact that she was not entitled to a share according to Chinese customary rule of patrilineal succession in her home village.

My mother would occasionally bring my brothers and myself to visit her parent's

family during important Chinese festivals for family gatherings. From the time that we were children, my brothers and I also loved to return to our mother's parent's home on our own. During our long school holidays like Christmas, Chinese New Years, Easter and summer vacations, we almost always stayed in my mother's home village.

When I was in my mother's home village, I met up with my friends and played with them everyday. We often went to the grassland at the gateway of the village and stayed there catching grasshoppers, climbing trees, flying kites, playing football, engaging in hide-and-seek or simply running and chasing each other with much laughter and excitement. When we took a rest and enjoyed the shade under a large tree, we chatted and joked among ourselves and occasionally shared candies and snacks.

Aside from these various leisure activities and games, I had to help my grandmother with household chores. Usually, I followed her every morning to the small market town. In this market town, we bought the daily foodstuff and other necessities after having had breakfast in a simple canteen. When it was time for her to prepare lunch and dinner, I had to stop playing and return home to help her. Whenever we left home to the public tap in the village to wash things, she liked to chat and show other people that I was her youngest grandson. In most cases, my grandmother would give me little work to do and it was very easy, therefore I would simply stand by her

and listen to her talk with others. I also came to know that what she really wanted was not my help but my company with which she would feel very satisfied and comfortable.

As I frequently visited my mother's home village, my mother's peers and other senior men and women in the village knew me and occasionally talked to me. Through my mother's kinship with them under the same clan, I have my kinship links with them too. Normally, I address them as "aunt" or "uncle" and they simply call me by my name. But, for some old people who would occasionally fail to remember my name, they used to identify me as 'A-ying's son' or 'A-Liang's grandson' (i.e., a calling either by my mother's name with my kinship with her or by my grandmother's name with my kinship with her). In many conversations, they also liked sharing their experiences of life with me, in a way, which was more or less similar to what I had experienced with my mother. Occasionally, I would also be invited to join their regular festival activities, communal functions and banquets in their ancestral hall.

III. Self-reflection in ethnographic encounters

This personal account indicates an important research issue in my study, in that the New Territories to me is not just an ethnographic field, but also an inseparable part

of my *lebenswelt*. My access and attachment to it come through the ‘natural will’ (using Tonnies’ term) of my mother and the social bonds of kinship from my mother’s side. I have merged into this bond since early childhood, that is to say I have been closely living in it. But, by the same token, my relationship with my research field and my research subjects could be likened to the relationship between fish with water. These subjects are so direct and intimate to me that I have long taken them for granted.

For instance, I gained certain insights into my relationships with the village and its residents through the concept of ‘uterine family’ discussed by Margery Wolf (1972). When I had a chance to study her work during my development in the academic field I then saw my existence in the village as linked to the important practice of women in developing their own uterine family and network within but beyond the patriarchal community of men in the village world. Furthermore, it was clear that I had frequently been viewed as a ‘subject’ by elderly villagers in order to transmit their local histories and to share their structure of feelings. Prior to the fieldwork, I encountered many moments in which villagers employed their own living experiences to make their own points or, rather, to articulate views of themselves in and through the histories they told.

At a general socio-political level, I was not aware of the peculiar colonial

discourse relating to the New Territories until I studied at a university and eventually learnt some of these concepts from a course. Accordingly, I began to be alerted to the issue that there was a long British colonial practice known as ‘indirect rule’. Only then did I begin to question why my mother had been excluded from any entitlement to her parent’s property.

As I began my fieldwork, these specific personal experiences encouraged me to focus on particular issues, ones which my mother’s accounts had led me to put at front of the questions that I asked when preparing a research proposal and making my first ‘fieldwork’ entry into the village. These experiences helped to lead me to view that female experiences were central, despite the relatively limited mention of these issues in the existing literature. In short, my own life-history is an important of the reason why I become aware of the fundamental significance but as yet under-explored area of gender issues in the colonial New Territories, and why I decided to explore it the present research.

IV. Becoming an observer in the field: research methods and data collections

As a long-term participator and as an insider in the field, it is hard to pinpoint exactly when my observations of the village community in the New Territories started.

Figure 3.2: Fieldwork process in An He village

Periods	Fieldwork steps	Research tasks
Nov 1998 to Jan 1999	Starting my research by revisiting the village and renting a house in the village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Observing the general pattern of daily community life in the village ■ Getting to know the people in the village by visiting their households and having general talks with them ■ Identifying key informants for my research
Feb 1999 to Aug 1999	Staying in the rented house in the village with about five to six days per week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Doing interviews with 38 village men and 45 women by semi-structured conversations ■ Having focused interviews with 4 elderly men and 6 elderly women ■ Observing the different community activities by women and men in the village by joining them ■ Investigating the Dengs lineage practices by having consultations with their manager of their ancestral affairs and collecting genealogy and other written materials (e.g., land deeds, working documents and letters)
Sep 1999 to Jan 2000	Continuing my stay in the village and enlarging the scope of research for the wider local context to the village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Following the village political practices by seeing a senior village leader, and observing his works for people and his meetings with other village leaders and local activists. ■ Observing people's regular communal activities by helping them to prepare them and joining the events. ■ Collecting demographic data of the village by conducting census ■ Obtaining the general history and local stories of the region of Fu Mei Au by meeting with an oral historian of the people ■ Deriving official data and information by visiting district office, land department and court library ■ Gathering news reports and other printed information related to the village by library research

However, it was in 1998 that I produced a research proposal to carry out a fifteen month fieldwork in my mother's village, An He in the district of Fu Mei Au, north New Territories, Hong Kong. Now let me first outline my fieldwork process in Figure 3.2. I then go on to detail the specific fieldwork steps I had taken in the field during each specific periods in the following discussion.

During the first period of my fieldwork research, I commenced my ethnographic investigation by re-visiting my mother's village several times to arrange to rent somewhere to live in the village. With the help of my two uncles (my mother's brothers) and my aunt (my second uncle's wife) in the village, I eventually rented a little old house close to the open area at the gateway of the village. Subsequently, I moved into the village with some basic household effects, but also took on a research role as an ethnographic investigator. Specifically, I started to carefully observe the daily practices of people in their community by staying around the village. I took fieldnotes in my working diary, as detailed as possible, of what I saw and encountered. I explained that I was in the village to do research as I (re)-introduced myself to people. Usually, I started my self-introduction by telling them my student status in Britain and then said that I wanted to know more about their village for my thesis. People's responses were varied. Some of them simply noted it without further question. But

others showed their curiosity in my work and continued to ask for more details. When I explained more I told them that my research interests were in their history, ancestral affairs, village rules and practices. I also took the opportunity to ask them for some further discussions with them concerning my research interests. Their responses to my request were equally varied. For instance, several people not only refused my request but even came to consider my work to be pointless. One of them challenged the value of my research, saying:

“How come this old stuff is worth studying? If you have time for studying, you should go to study the ways of making money.”

As far as the majority were concerned, however, they did generally show their willingness to help me. Some of them even immediately started to talk over the subjects I had mentioned and enjoyed showing off their knowledge to me. On one occasion, I not only grasped some preliminary information for my research but also obtained a remarkable response from an elderly man as follows:

“Good! That [my research work] is good! In fact, at the present time the people who know the village rules are increasingly few, even as our own people. If nobody works to write them down, it will be hard to hand them down.”

During the first period of my fieldwork research I actively made contacts with

more and more people and began to identify those who might become key informants. Obviously, my kinship linkage with them provided me some advantages in this regard. For instance, I was already acquainted with a number of my maternal kin from my past connections with the village, when I visited for occasional family meetings or festival celebrations. Throughout my fieldwork research, I simply needed to continue my contacts with them for my present study. In case of my distant cousins in the village, with whom I had few prior connections, I could rapidly trace my kinship with them and this helped me quickly develop rapport with them. For example, when I had just settled into the village and met a group of elderly women in the village, initially, they just talked casually among themselves, and then expressed some hesitation over who I was and what I was doing in their village. However, once they knew that my mother was their kinswoman, they turned the talk around to discuss my mother and asked me for her news as well as my news. They also actively renewed their kinship with me, saying they were my *Da Jin*.² One of them even felt particularly happy for meeting me again, and immediately recalled her past relationship with my parents and me:

“Oh! You are A-ying’s son! You are so tall and big now. Do you know that I was the go-between who helped your father to get married to your mother? When you were a baby, I held you in my arms and fed you with milk many times. Oh! It is so great! You are so tall and big now!”

² In the official Chinese kinship model, *Da Jin* is a specific kin term to refer to one’s mother’s brother’s wife. However, in the practical kinship model, my research indicates that *Da jin* is a general kin term used by people to refer to one’s kinswomen who had two generations senior than him or her in the clan.

As a matter of fact, since the people knew that I was their relative, it took me only about one to two months to become accepted by them and to become a visitor in their houses. By daily greeting them and initiating some general conversations, I also steadily became familiar with most of the people in the village with whom I had no kinship. Towards the end of the first period of my fieldwork, I knew the names of all the people in the village, and where they lived, and I managed to talk to them in the street on at least one occasion.

However, I also found that my prior relationship with some people in the village could become a disadvantage. One afternoon, I talked to my aunt in her home. She casually mentioned some details of how she helped me to rent a house and why I was refused the rental of my first choice in the village. Before she told me the answer, I had simply guessed that my failure might be due to offering too low a rent or too short a term of lease. Unexpectedly, my aunt told me that my failure was not due to either of these but because of a very personal consideration of the old female owner of that unit. She still remembered a past dispute with my mother's family in the village many years ago, even though I was not in the village at the time, much less involved in it.

Nevertheless, my friendly attitudes and behaviour towards the people helped me to overcome some existing (poor) relationships resulting from conflicts with my

mother's family. One morning, when I went out of the village for breakfast, I met the old female owner of that unit again in the street. To improve my relationship with her, I had already made it a habit to greet her whenever I saw her, and I continued to do so after discovering why she refused to rent me a house. Unexpectedly, she not only gave me a friendly response, with a satisfactory smile, but she also started talking to me, saying:

“Hi! Good morning! You are really nice! Every time you see me, you greet me. Few young people now will be like you to be so respectful towards elders. Do you know that I am your *Da Jin* as well? So, don't just say: 'Hi!' to me next time. Call me *Da Jin*. In fact, I was very familiar with your mother before she moved out after marriage. My daughter and I had also gone to Kowloon to see your mother when you were a boy.”

Subsequent to this breaking the ice, I not only managed to talk to her very often, but she also became one of my key informants for my research.

The second period of my fieldwork entailed the most essential part of my ethnographic investigations into the village for the present thesis. During this fieldwork period, I interviewed 45 women and 38 men in the village. These people included both the indigenous inhabitants (i.e., the Dengs) and the non-indigenous inhabitants in the village and came from all the different household and class

backgrounds represented in the village.³ Among them were 6 elderly women and 4 elderly men with whom I had focused interviews on a repeated basis throughout the course of the fieldwork.

However, I quickly found that my original plan to undertake formal interviews with people made them stressful and obtained no good result. For instance, I had in the first place attempted to interview an elderly woman after I thought that I knew her well and had talked to her very often. However, once she saw that I began to take down her answers to my questions in my notebook, she felt nervous and gave me only general and superficial responses. Eventually, I had to stop the interview with her prematurely.

Notwithstanding this, I found instead that my casual conversations and participation in daily discussions covered most of the issues my research sought to explore and examine. Accordingly, I used the method of semi-structured conversation as my major research tool. Importantly, this method not only allowed me to collect abundant reliable materials with intricate details but also to be able to report people's direct voices and perspectives. It also enabled me to see some essential issues whose

³ The term 'indigenous inhabitant' I used here is the official one. It refers to the predominant villagers who had their ancestor living in the villages in the New Territories at the 1st of July 1898. (see Chapter 1 for details). By the same token, the term 'non-indigenous inhabitant' refers to all the latecomers who have no ancestor living in the villages in the New Territories at that date. Generally, they are immigrants from Hong Kong city. The predominant Dengs in the village usually called them to be '*Wai Xing Ren*' (other surnamed people).

significance I had failed to recognize before carrying out of this research. For instance, it was not part of my original research plan to examine the community practice of rumor, personality assassination and sexual innuendo by local women and men. However, my semi-structured conversations with them frequently indicated that these subject matters were remarkably critical parts of their daily discourse and local disputes.

During the second period of my fieldwork research, I engaged myself in the different daily activities of women and men in their everyday lives as well, and observed them as closely as possible. Usually, I stayed in the open area at the gateway of the village in order to see the village women's habitual daily gathering during their leisure from mid-afternoon until dusk. In the process, I also joined in their chatting and joking, and occasionally played with or helped them to look after their children. Moreover, through these daily meetings I was occasionally invited to join them in their other usual activities like shopping and having food and drink in a nearby market town.

As far as the village men are concerned, I frequently followed my two uncles to see their common daily activities with other village men and thereby met with and talked to other village men in their habitual meeting places in the village and canteens

or tea-stalls outside. In particular, I often went to a private clubhouse in the village where these men regularly spent time chatting and playing cards. In this respect, there was no indication that my showing up in their clubhouse was unwelcome, much less perceived as harmful to them. Indeed, I managed to talk to them freely and to joke with them. Eventually, I could even go there on my own to keep in contact with them. But, sometimes, some village men felt that I was odd in that I often sat through their gambling till late at night (and occasionally overnight) but showed no interest in joining in.

Beyond these focused ethnographic observations of village women and men in their usual community practices, my close relationship with my uncles, particularly my youngest uncle, enabled me to ask about lineage organizations and their impact on village politics. Specifically, for a time I was unable to obtain adequate information from people regarding their lineage organization. For one thing, this was a subject matter of relevance to the Dengs alone, so the other people in the village had no idea of it at all. For another thing, their lineage organization was so complex that most Dengs had no clear understanding of the details either. However, I found that my youngest uncle actually was one of those men collectively appointed from their agnatic corporation as managers over the ancestral estates owned by the lineage organization.

He had held this position for a long time, and had a good knowledge of the lineage organization. He also possessed abundant working documents related to it such as genealogy, land deeds, past records and official letters relating to their ancestral business. Since I proceeded to consult with him for the details in this regard, he not only explained the matters to me, but also provided me with the documents. On one occasion, he even claimed that,

“I am your uncle. I of course have the real stuff [the working documents] for you! If it is to other people, I definitely don’t bother to entertain them.”

On the other hand, my youngest uncle was an activist in village politics and a village leader’s close associate. Through his introduction, I swiftly met this village leader and became an assistant in the election of village leaders for the continuation of his office from 1999 to 2003. Since he was successful, I also continued to help him in this role throughout the rest of my research. Accordingly, I often visited his office and observed his work for people and his meetings with other locally important figures. I also helped him or his close fellows to prepare various occasional public activities and join in the events such as open ceremonies, collective celebrations, public assemblies and clan meetings. However, my intensive connection with this village leader through my youngest uncle’s personal network obviously prevented me from getting close to

the opposite party in the village. For instance, when I worked in his election campaign, I could not meet the other candidates who were competing with him. Through my regular visiting of his office, people knew me as his new assistant.

Of course, it is not necessary to be an insider in the field in order to have a clear picture of it. Instead, an insider position in the field may lead the research to neglect some important research tasks because of over-closeness with the field. A case in point is when I checked my research findings toward the end of my second fieldwork period in the village. In the process, I suddenly found that my understanding of the village actually remained incomplete. For instance, I was very familiar with many households in the village and visited them directly for observation and conversations without warning. I had no clear idea however, of the numbers of households and people in the village. Similarly, the wider local context of the village is the region of Fu Au Mei. I was in the region and worked there throughout my fieldwork. I had, however, no adequate information about it, particularly its general transformation in recent history. It was precisely these self-reflections upon my research that helped to orient my final period of fieldwork.

During the final period of my fieldwork, one of my important tasks was to conduct a census of the fieldwork village. Accordingly, I proceeded to count the total

number of houses and photographed representative ones in the village. I continued to visit the households in the village and talked to the household heads to collect demographic data on their households. I continued interviewing elderly men and women, and asked them about the region of Fu Mei Au. In this way, I not only managed to obtain some important information from these interviews, but also found an oral social historian of Fu Mei Au by way of an introduction by an elderly man. One afternoon, this elderly man led me to see him in his home in another village in Fu Mei Au. I was introduced to the oral historian by the elderly man as follows:

“He [me] is A-keung I mentioned to you yesterday. He wants to know the history of our place and our village rules. You can have no worry about showing him everything. He is *zi ji ren* [one of us].”

To clarify some details, I subsequently went on my own to meet this oral historian in his home. In total, I had two face-to-face meetings and several follow-up telephone interviews with him. In addition, I also proceeded to search for the general political and historical background to the village and Fu Mei Au by collecting existing official information and printed materials. In this regard, the official departments and libraries I consulted included the district office, the land department, the court library and the archives in the University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University and Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The materials I collected included cadastral data,

administrative records, legislative documents, court files and newspaper reports.

Taken together, my fifteen month fieldwork in the New Territories of Hong Kong had high and low points. Sometimes, the materials I needed came to me easily and rapidly but, at other times, my progress was slow. Sometimes, I found it interesting to listen to people's experiences but, at other times, I felt depressed as they told me their tragic stories and described their sorrows and hardships. Importantly, I found that my fieldwork transformed my subject position in the village. Towards the end of my fieldwork in the village, I was not simply known as a student but rather I was perceived as an expert by the people concerning their rules and practices. For instance, before I eventually returned to Scotland for writing up my present thesis, I received a sudden phone call from a village man whom I did not know during my fieldwork.

However, he introduced himself to me on the phone and said:

"I live in the village of Chang Ping [another village in Fu Mei Au]. But, I learnt from the people in your uncles' village that you study our village rules and know them well. Indeed, I am your uncles' [cousin] brother in the clan. I also get your phone number from him [my youngest uncle]. I have a problem and hope that you can help."

In short, he asked for my advice regarding his recent complex dispute with a woman over his household property. His story was that he had a court suit with a woman who claimed to be his deceased father's second wife. Most critically, she

asked for a share of his household property for she had a son from his deceased father. Accordingly, this village man not only planned to undertake a DNA test to check whether her claim was true, but he also wanted to know whether village rules recognized a private son as having inheritance rights. Above all, he expected me to advise him whether he could win the case in court. On this occasion, I carefully listened to his case. However, the questions he posed to me by and large were beyond my competence and made me embarrassed. Thereupon, I just sought to evade his questions as far as I could, and told him that everything still depended on how the judge would arbitrate his case. Afterwards, I did not follow up his case so as to avoid being drawn into his household dispute. On his side, it might be due to his dissatisfaction with my indefinite answer to him that he made no further contact with me too.

Looking back, the lesson I learnt from this fieldwork in the New Territories is that an insider in the field needs to be self-reflexive and must depend on numerous intensive and careful investigations in order to complete a research project. Most of the materials I use for the following chapters also could not come until after I had transformed myself from a direct participant to a sensitive observer in the field. In addition, at different points of time I drew on materials obtained from other

preliminary or supplementary researches, and I use these in the ethnographic discussions in the following chapters. Accordingly, I have provided special editing notes where I used these extra materials, to pinpoint when and how I collected them, to clarify my information sources. I also have produced documentation notes as to the sources of printed information, written records or secondary materials. Throughout the ethnographic discussion in the following chapters, I use pseudonyms for both local people and place names in order to protect the privacy of the research subjects in the present study.

Chapter 4: A Chinese village community in historical conjuncture

Introduction

In this chapter, I draw on my case study of An He, a village about 25 kilometers from the city centre of Hong Kong, to account for the overwhelming changes in the New Territories up to the present day. At the conceptual level, I demonstrate how the continuity of the Chinese communities in the New Territories, as many researches have shown, is entirely relational and comes through both internal and external dynamics.¹ At the empirical level, I concentrate upon the living setting of An He village, and its relationships with other so-called “Dengs villages” in the region of Fu Mei Au. I use oral histories to chart the community changes during the British colonial era, taking into account the economic base of the village, labour migration from the village, and the effects of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation in Hong Kong. I show the central importance of the special status of “indigenous groups” in affecting the livelihood and economic opportunities of villagers like the Dengs, especially in the past 30 to 40 years. I point out that some features of village life that are seen as “traditional” in fact have relatively recent origins. Finally, I highlight the complexity

¹ For example, Chiu and Hung (1997), Chun (1985, 1996 & 2000), Neslon (1969) and R. Waston (1985). For detail please refer to Chapter 2.

of Chinese village communities as context-specific outcomes of history.

I. Backdrop: physical setting and demographic patterns

With a little stream meandering through from south to north, Fu Mei Au is one of the few flat and well-irrigated basins in the mountainous New Territories of Hong Kong. The indigenous residents in this basin come from one of the branches dispersed from the Deng clan, which had not only settled in the New Territories for centuries before British colonial rule, but also claimed to be one of the five greatest, most populous and propertied, clans of the New Territories with numerous powerful kinsmen from generation to generation.²

Internally, the Dengs in Fu Mei Au established eleven small villages and collectively form one higher order village or, in local Chinese terms, a *Sheung* among themselves. By taking the name of the place, their Sheung is called Fu Mei Au Sheung. Through collective efforts, they built a three-tiered, classical and grandiose ancestral hall which, according to the inscription at its doorway, is now over three hundred years old. This ancestral hall currently provides them with not only a sacred religious venue for undertaking regular ancestral worships and collective celebrations, but it is also a formal meeting place for holding their supra-village assemblies, discussing their

public affairs and making their highest communal decisions. The other important communal establishments in their Sheung include a kindergarten, a primary school, a *Tain Hou* temple, a Taoist church and an ancestral graveyard. Taking all of them together, their establishments in Fu Mei Au are multiple and cover educational, religious, political and jurisdictional areas.

An He village is one of eleven small Deng villages in Fu Mei Au. The Dengs' genealogy indicates that it was neither the earliest nor the latest Deng village in the region. It was founded through clan dispersion since 1740 during the Chinese Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).³ Geographically, it lies southwest of the centre of Fu Mei Au and is linked with the other ten Deng villages by a twisting public pavement with numerous little footpaths. Topographically, it is open to an extensive stretch of fragmented farmlands from west to north and protected by a modest, undulating range of mountainous ridges from east to south (Figure 4.1).

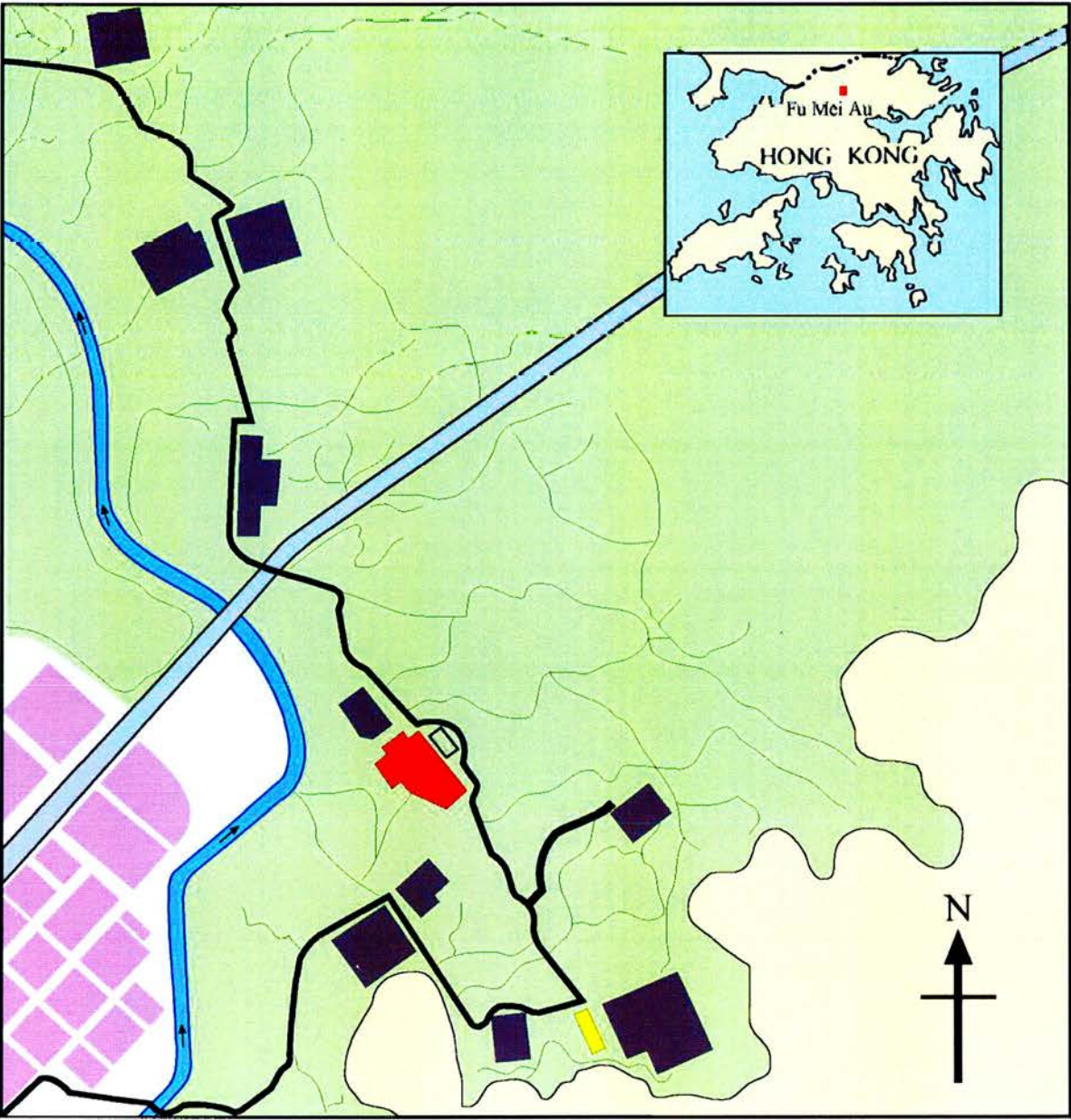
In scale, An He village also is neither the largest nor the smallest village in Fu Mei Au.⁴ It contains seventy, one to three storeyed, houses which all belong to the Dengs. Additionally, the Dengs in An He village are exceptional in their possession of

² For more details please refer to Chapter 1.











³ Their genealogy shows that the eleven Dengs' villages in Fu Mei Au were established at different times. Their earliest one was developed from the late Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). Their latest one was developed from the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Accordingly, this An He village was founded about four hundred years after the earliest one and about one hundred years before the latest one.

⁴ In Fu Mei Au, ethnographic information indicates that the largest Dengs' village possesses over a

Figure 4.1. A sketch map of Fu Mei Au



Keys:

	An He Village		Market Town		Highway		Drainage
	Ancestral Hall		Farmland		Pavement		
	Other Dongs' Villages		Mountains		Footpaths		

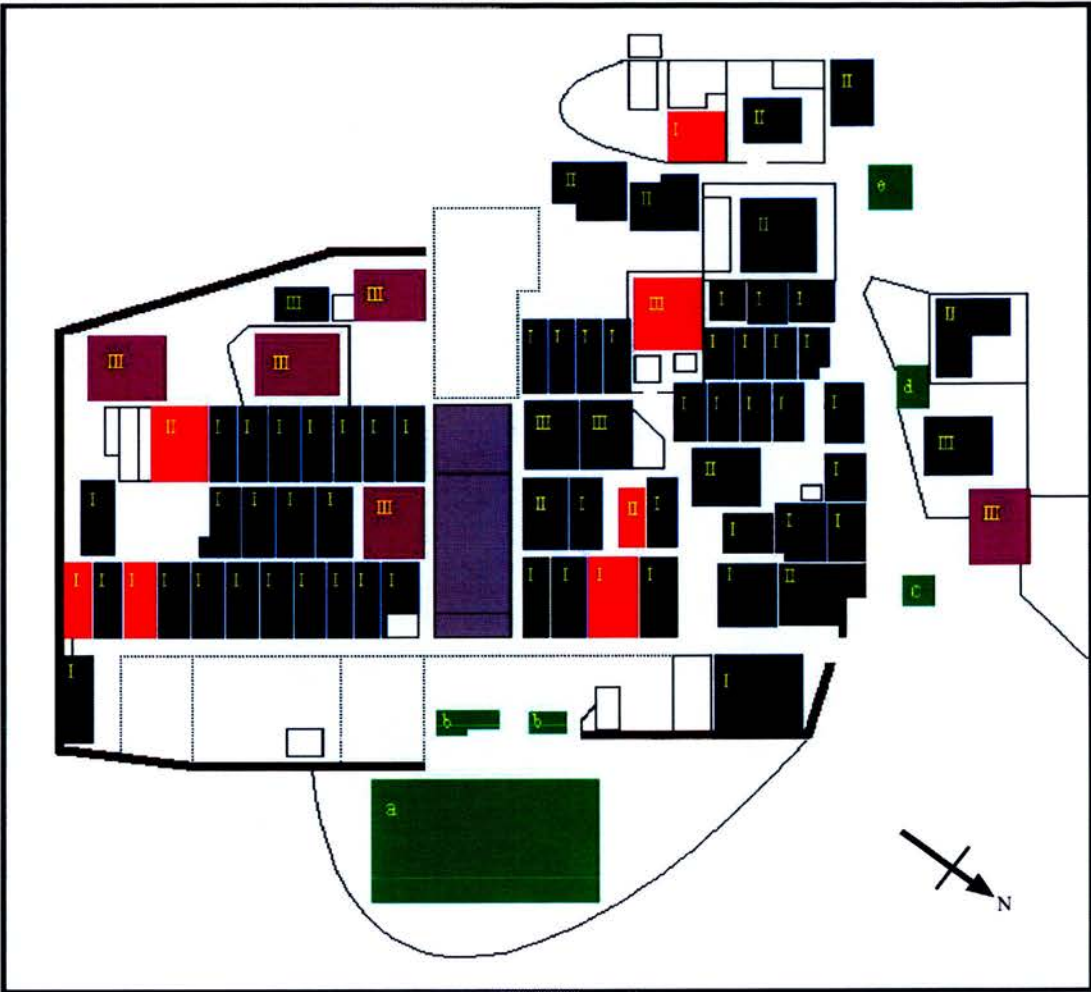
hundred and so houses whereas the smallest one contains about ten houses.

an ancestral hall for their own functions and a communal study hall especially for their children's study, which are not uniformly available in the other ten Deng villages in the same region. Yet, I was told in the field that both are important symbols of communal privilege. The communal study hall was ruined many years ago and has since remained a bare piece of land. It existed only as a past glory to be recalled in everyday conversation. Only their ancestral hall, which is a modest two-storeyed structure with an enclosed forecourt, is still in good condition and in regular use.

The An He village is built in a roughly rectangular shape with a consistent regularity in its spatial arrangement. The Dengs' ancestral hall lies in the centre of the village beside the currently ruined site of the old communal study hall. The size of the residential houses in average is about three to five hundred square feet. Most of them are built in an orderly fashion, next to the two sides of the ancestral hall in several parallel blocks, commonly facing the same direction to the northeastern side and neatly separated by little lanes with a main street to the village entrance. In addition, there are some extended residences outside the immediate village boundary with a public square, a *Tu Di* temple and a simple general store in close vicinity to the village (Figure 4.2).

At first glance, the physical layout of An He village supports the conventional

Figure 4.2. A sketch map of An He village



- Key:**
- Roman Figure:** Number of storey
- : Residence for self-using
 - : Residence for renting out
 - : Residence for both
 - : Obsolete residence
 - : Extended living area
 - : Ancestral hall
 - : Open area
 - : Communal facilities
 (a: communal square b: shared resting place & bench
 c: temple of Earth-God d: village store e: public toilet)

official stereotyping of the Chinese village communities in the New Territories. For example, the first colonial report by Lockhart in 1899 gave a description that:

“They [the Chinese village communities] are rectangular or square in shape, and are enclosed within brick walls about 16 feet in height, flanked by square towers, and surrounded by a moat some 40 feet in width. They have one entrance, protected with iron gates. Within the walls, houses of the usual type are found, built with great regularity. There is one main street from either side of which small lanes branch off in parallel rows. The object of these villages being walled is to afford the inhabitant greater security in case of attack, and to place them in a stronger position of defense in the event of clan feuds.” (Lockhart: 1899, p.6)

A recent official description by the post-colonial Chinese government in their current preservation project of the local heritage maintains a similar imagery and illustrates it with some specific examples. To name some,

“San Wai is also know as Kun Lung Wai because of the characters “Kun Lung” engraved on the lintel of the entrance. The walled village ... is enclosed by green-brick walls. Four watchtowers were constructed at the four corners of the enclosing walls for the defense of the village. A pair of chained-ring iron gates were installed at the front entrance. The moat, originally surrounded the walled village, has been filled up. The layout of the houses inside the village is in an orderly manner... .” (Hong Kong Government: 1999, p.8)

“Tung Kok Wai, established by the 13th generation ancestor Tang Lung-kong (1363-1421), probably has a history of more than five hundred years. ... The house inside the village were mainly arranged in four rows and facing the northwest. Originally the village was enclosed by a moat, and grey-brick walls with towers at the four corners.” (ibid, p.14)

“Ma Wat Wai, which was built by the Tang clan during the reign of Qianlong (1736-1795), is located in the northwest of Lo Wai. The village is enclosed by walls on four sides with the main entrance facing the north.

A pair of chained-ring gates were installed at the main entrance... . All the houses in the village were built in orderly rows.” (ibid, p.24)

However, a deeper look into the situation quickly finds many discrepancies in the conventional official stereotypes, not just in terms of specific characteristics, but even in the overall (old-aged and parochial) impression. For example, An He village is not so “self-enclosed”, thereby “defensive” and “exclusive” in its physical setting. Its village entrance is without an iron-gate or watchtower at the top, much less a surrounding moat. Its enclosure is not formed through any tall and thick walls as communal fortification but rather it is constituted by some minimal and truncated blocks that in turn are constituted by the outer walls of the adjoining houses at the four sides. Above all, this obvious variance in the physical setting of the village communities in the New Territories is not a singular exception. The outlook of many other village communities is also not identical to the conventional colonial and post-colonial official stereotyping. As far as the eleven Deng villages in Fu Mei Au are concerned, there are five more cases like An He village in term of their appearances. In a sense, the dominant and timeworn impression of the Chinese village communities in the New Territories as castle-like is a highly partial characterisation that has served to produce a parochial imagery of a traditional Chinese settlement.

Walled village has been an extremely common and widely accepted name in popular or academic literature for the Chinese communities in the New Territories that can be rather problematic because of its indiscriminate character.

Furthermore, local circumstance shows that the existing residential environment in An He village exhibits few traditional architectural features. Instead, old and new houses are irregularly and abruptly mixed together ad hoc as a consequence of the frequent renewal projects by the Dengs for their residences. Most of their residences have been rebuilt into the two or three storeyed, highly elaborate, and bungalow-like Spanish style houses at different times; only a few residences have remained unchanged and have therefore kept their original features: single-storeyed, simple and crude brick houses with a scaled and ridged top in the old Chinese style (Illustrations: Pictures of An He village). The Dengs in An He village have long been undertaking renewal projects not simply for their own residential needs but also for earning rental income. Currently, they have also adopted an increasingly common practice of moving into their newest rebuilt houses in the extension area of the village under better living conditions, while they lease their original residences and other ancestral houses in the village to outsiders. Some Dengs have moved to the city or even to foreign countries, with only occasional home visits for short spells. Subsequently, the

Figure. 4.3: Basic census data of An He village

A: Housing conditions		
Number of houses: 70		
One-storeyed	Two-storeyed	Three-storeyed
53	9	8
Number of residential units: 84		
Owner-occupied	Rented	Unoccupied
15	63	6

B: Dengs population		
Number of people: 97		
Within village	In extended village area*	In urban area/foreign country**
39	9	59
Number of households: 39		
Within village	In extended village area	In urban area/ foreign county
14	9	16

C: Non-Dengs population		
Number of people: 98		
Within village	In extended village area	In urban area/foreign country
98	--	--
Number of households: 36		
Within village	In extended village area	In urban area/ foreign county
36	--	--

*The extended village area refers to the area outside of the immediate boundary of the village but within walking distance in Fu Mei Au.

** There are only 3 households living in the urban area of Hong Kong in total; the rest are all living in foreign countries, either United Kingdom or Netherlands. The Dengs’ households in this column do not include the households of the Dengs’ married-out-daughters.

-- : Not applicable

residents in An He village consist of a large number of non-Deng people, most of whom are transitory immigrants from the general urban area of Hong Kong. The Dengs in An He are no longer the only social group and do not even constitute the majority in the resident population in the village. The criterion, through which the An He village is known as an “indigenous village”, or a “single-surname village” in an anthropological sense, is merely through their exclusive possession of the estate. Indigenous is a term based on structural and economic circumstances rather than based on the living reality. Figure 4.3 provides some demographic tables from my census to indicate the basic population structure of the village in early 2000.

All in all, these complex residential practices and demographic patterns in An He village come from various human dynamic and consequential shaping forces on the ground level and they represent important changing meanings of land in people’s lives. Now I will go on to produce a historical ethnographic discussion of these meanings in the pursuit of a more substantial understanding of the formation of this community and, by implication, the process of social change in the New Territories during the colonial era – a process that currently remains muted under the dominant discourse.

II. The agricultural past

Oral histories collected from the elderly Dengs indicates that their material life in the past, by and large relied on natural resources and the land surrounding their village. For instance, their main heat source was the firewood they collected from the nearby forests. Only a few wealthy households could obtain their fuel from the marketplace. Their water was from a village well or the stream that flows through Fu Mei Au. The clan organisation controlled the village well and charged the user-households a regular cash payment for fetching water from it. Under this communal rule, many poorer households were forced to fetch water from the stream, which was not only inferior in quality, but it was also highly inconvenient.

Most villagers maintained their livelihood through agricultural production from intensive cultivation. Their chief crop was rice with two harvests per year during summer and autumn. Their complementary crops included various year round and seasonal vegetables such as taro, sweet potato, legume, cabbage, lettuce, Pai Choi, turnip and white-ground. Oxen were quite commonly used to help the paddy cultivation whereas their vegetable crops were mainly planted by hand in some less fertile or residual fields. They undertook their agricultural production not only for subsistence, but also for sale in the market. The daily cycle of agricultural work with the occasional

visits to the marketplace formed their common living routines.

In addition to cultivation, they generally kept livestock such as hens, ducks, geese and/or pigs. But most villagers just kept their livestock in some corners in their houses while allowing a small number to run around in their courtyard. They seldom consumed their own livestock for their meals except for some special events, festivals or celebrations, as it was normally for sale and in most cases livestock constituted an important source of household income for them. If they went to slaughter a pig from their own livestock, an old Deng villager said, it was an occasional and communal event:

“You know, people did not have refrigerators then. ... If some household decided to kill a pig for something special, they had to run around the village to ask how many people would like to share the pig; discussed which part would go to whom; thought about whether it would eventually remain too much or not, so and so. It was very interesting indeed! The whole village also would feel very great and happy.”⁵

However, I was told that in the past the Dengs in An He village had generally suffered from a lack of land for agricultural production. In spite of their powerful clan, they seldom obtained real advantages and privileges. On the contrary, there is a story told far and wide in their Fu Mei Au Sheung that their ancestors for opium had given

⁵ In order to keep the direct sense of the people's voices, the quotations I have abstracted from their speeches for the ethnographic discussion in the present thesis, will have as few editing revisions as possible. Some of the important native Chinese idioms and terms also will be literally translated into

much of their once abundant ancestral land up after the British merchants imported opium into China during the Qing Dynasty. Deng Yin-fu, a village elder over 70, is the oral historian of the Deng in Fu Mei Au. He said:

“Our ancestors had once owned abundant land for sure. I also learned from the elders, when I was a little boy, that those lands one could see at the highest point of Fu Mei Au were once all our ancestral land. But, I don’t know why there were always more bad sons than good sons! As the “red hair ghosts [a local derogatory term referring to British colonizers] sold opium, people cared for nothing but opium and turned our ancestral land into opium smoke. Indeed, all the [ancestral] land we now have, are only the remaining bits.”

Locally, information from the Dengs in An He village indicates that very few of their households were fully owned by peasants or well-to-do landlords. Seniors in the village Dengs’ could name at the most two or three cases. The majority of them needed to rent land from other people for cultivation in addition to their own family land inherited from their ancestors. Some were even totally landless households who had to work as tenant farmers in others’ lands, thereby living under constant economic pressure to make regular rental payments. Worse, they claimed that they had little bargaining power in the market for their produce as the people from another clan dominated it. When they went to sell their produce, they had to accept a lower price and claimed that they were often cheated through underestimating the weight of their

English but added with necessary explanatory notes.

agricultural produce. This made their agriculture-based lives hard and many were nearly destitute.

To meet their own domestic economic needs, I was told that most households in the village needed to take up seasonal or casual employment from wealthy households in nearby villages. The most usual jobs in this seasonal or casual employment were the various miscellaneous agricultural or domestic tasks such as planting and harvesting other crops, clearing wild grass for others' farms and fetching water for others' households. The additional incomes they could earn from these marginal activities formed an important part of their household economy.

In general, getting by frugally in multiple (self-employed or employed) occupations was the rule. Lacking enough land to secure their household livelihood and thereby making do under constant economic shortages constituted most of their common past experiences. Through a reference to food, a Deng elder illustrated their humble agricultural past as follows:

“In the past, our life was miserable! What we could get for eating simply was rice and vegetable. What we drunk was well water. But the people now say it is unsanitary. Shit! Usually, we would simply mix the rice and taro together to eat and that was all for our daily meals. Isn't it unbelievable!”

“Our past life absolutely is not a bit like the present people who have so much food, pork now, beef then, chicken now, fish then, so and so. Just like the Coca Cola, which the children now love to drink so frequently.

Fuck! Needless to say, we never had a sip when we were children. We actually never saw this and knew what it looked like then!”

III. The impact of World War II

An He village is a small community tucked away into an isolated corner that has never figured prominently on the historical stage of the world. However, local story indicates that world history has had a great impact upon this small village and left numerous irrecoverable damages and injuries on people's lives at different levels. During World War II, An He village did not escape from Japanese imperial expansion and intrusions. When the Japanese took over Hong Kong from Britain by force, An He village was quickly placed under their military control and surveillance. The surviving Deng elders recall that their Fu Mei Au Sheung was renamed to as *No. One Station* under Japanese military rule. They were required to select some village leaders among themselves to represent themselves and facilitate local administration for the Japanese officials. Both men and women were forced to toil for the Japanese armies and frequently met with humiliation, mistreatment and even torture in their duties. The situation of women was the most vulnerable because of the risk of sexual harassment and even rape by Japanese soldiers. To reduce this danger and to protect themselves, they often soiled their faces with dirt to make themselves look ugly and

often hid to escape from the Japanese soldiers. An old woman in An He village recalled an encounter of hers during the period of Japanese occupation as follows:

“The Japanese are all beasts! All should have no good ending! At that time [Japanese occupation], I was pregnant with a big belly. How was it that they [three Japanese soldiers] would seek to rape me! But, I was really deadly frightened. I kept shouting: “Help” and ran back home as fast as I could. Still, they kept chasing me home. And, I had no room to go but climbed up onto the roof. God Damn! They did not let me go but climbed up to the roof too. Finally, I was forced to jump over the roof without regard to my pregnancy and thought ‘I must have died-hard’... . But, thanks to my mother-in-law who finally came to save me no matter how dangerous it was. ... Bastard Japanese! What the hell they did!”

The Japanese occupation as an episode in the history of Hong Kong lasted only for three years and eight months.⁶ But, the current circumstance on the ground shows that the impact remained in the local practices even up to now. In the first place, the village men and women in Fu Mei Au still call their Sheung as No. One Station, as it was called under the Japanese military rule. The most important impact of course was the continuation of the village representative system by the British when they returned after the defeat of the Japanese. Local history clearly shows that this village representative system was not a “traditional” institution as it was widely proclaimed by colonial administrators and as it has become a taken-for-granted view on the society in Hong Kong. In this regard, Deng Yin-fu also argued that,

“Village leader! Shit! It is a very, very late matter indeed. It appeared only after the Japanese came because they asked us to do it. And, we had to give them some people. Originally, we only depended on the elders to discuss and decide our communal matters. No election like the present one. Even after the [British colonial] government formally developed the village leader system into what they called as “village representative system”, our people still showed no real interest in it until the recent ten to twenty years.”

Above all, Deng Yin-fu pointed out that Japanese occupation with their frequent military actions produced terrible famine and destruction in the region. Numerous people lost their lives, many households collapsed and the community remained critically depressed and impoverished for a long time. The number of their clan members in Fu Mei Au was rapidly reduced from about nine hundred and seventy to two hundred during the occupation. Moreover, the extreme hardships in the past not only dislocated the local people, turning many into refugees, but also left many heart-breaking domestic tragedies and deeply painful personal experiences that continue to affect them throughout the later course of their lives.

Uncle Xiang, one of the elderly residents who survived the War, is a remarkable individual case in point. According to his autobiographical account, he originated from an ordinary peasant family in Mainland China. In the late 1930s, when he was in his teens, he fled to Hong Kong from Mainland China to escape from Japanese

⁶ Please refer to Chapter 1 for the details of what was generally happening during this martial period.

aggression. Sadly, both his parents died from hunger and illness during their escape. When the Japanese subsequently invaded Hong Kong, his escape route took him to An He village. As a result, he not only saved himself, but also became an adopted child in a sonless Deng household.

Most of the time, Uncle Xiang said: he seldom speaks about his early life during the Japanese war. In the community, his original surname is even now a long-standing mystery. His seven children are unclear on his original surname as well. All they know is that he was extremely grief-stricken during that period of his life. Once, when Uncle Xiang unexpectedly talked about the death of his natal parents, he could not control his emotions but became very sad. With a long silence and a deeply sorrowful expression, he abruptly but emotionally ended his talk as follows:

“Don’t want to recall that indeed! Don’t want to recall them indeed! ... Even my seven children, I also never let them know. It was so sad! My [natal] mother. ... [deep sigh and silence]. Just leave that in my mind. Anyway, I have an alright life and brought all my children up!”

However, Uncle Xiang’s personal enmity and aversion against Japanese rule is so strong that he could not help projecting them into any Japanese influences. Once, he angrily discussed the currently popular practice of eating Japanese sushi in Hong Kong and forcefully argued that:

“I have to ask those people who like this: how could they swallow up the

fucking Japanese food! Have those people forgotten what the ‘Japanese ghost’ [a local derogatory term referring to the Japanese] did to us! How the fucking ‘Japanese ghost’ caused us deadly hunger! Fuck them off! I tried to escape from them again and again. But, they put me to a dead end. It was all because of them: I was so fucking miserable then. My real parents died and my family collapsed!”

IV. The great post-war transformation

Starting from the post-war period onwards, Hong Kong underwent a dramatic and rapid industrial and metropolitan transformation, an obvious economic achievement that has widely been interpreted as a contemporary “miracle” in the modern world.⁷ However, oral history indicates: the story on the other side was that these changes in part was brought about from the exploitation and extraction of labour and land from the New Territories throughout the later period of British colonial domination. The original agricultural practices of people increasingly failed to sustain their basic material life, which in turn led to numerous fundamental livelihood changes vis-à-vis the new economy reality in the villages and even included widespread migration for economic opportunities.

Specifically, information from the older Dengs in An He village shows that the first obvious livelihood change by them was the wide spread rise of market-oriented crops in their cultivation practices. In practice, vegetables as the more saleable and

profitable crop quickly replaced the paddy, which had long been their chief crop in the past. Their livelihood also increasingly relied on cash income from market exchanges rather than on their direct consumption of the crops they cultivated. But, the most remarkable change was surely the shift into the industrial work force from about the late 50s. It was through a public project by the colonial government for the construction of a military camp close to the village, that initiated such fundamental livelihood changes in their lives. During that time, according to informants' recollection, official teams were sent to visit their community house-by-house to hire both male and female construction workers for the project. Subsequently, many men and women took up this new work opportunity. Some of them even continued to be employed by the government after the completion of the project by taking up other formal job positions in the military camp. In effect, this particular event not only created a common shared working experience in the histories of the elderly Dengs in An He village, but it also formed an important starting point of the transformation from agricultural workers to that of industrial wage labourers in the city of Hong Kong.

Generally, their personal histories shows that the work they took up was highly diversified, including construction work, manufacturing, canteen waiters or waitresses,

⁷ Rabushka, A. (1973), Woronoff, J. (1980) and Yang, Q. (1990)

cleaning men or women, domestic servants, miscellaneous helpers and so on. In their new industrial careers, they also had some flexibility in their occupations. The only thing that remained unchanged was that they were still living in extremely tough and hard conditions without adequate economic security. To make ends meet, they frequently took up numerous sidelines and work to take home. The most usual jobs they held in this area were the marginal tasks put out from the nearby factories such as turning over the seams of gloves, cutting the over-long threads of garments, assembling plastic flowers and linking and rolling the raw rattan for furniture. Additionally, some of them worked as garbage pickers, thereby collecting whatever might be saleable re-cycleable rubbish like carton paper, aluminum cans, glass bottles, copperwares and electric wires. Up to now there are still some old people in the village that have still kept up this practice, which is viewed by some as shameful.

Beyond these multiple livelihood strategies in Hong Kong, ethnographic materials indicate that many Dengs in An He village went to work abroad in Britain and the Netherlands in the early 1960s. In the local discourse, there was a prevailing myth that the path abroad, could be the road to self-made riches. In particular, men would have the necessary exposure in the outside world to widen their horizons and develop their careers. Information from their personal histories shows that most men

in the village that had worked in foreign countries had sent remittances back to their homes. In actual practice, their occupations in foreign countries tended to be mainly low-paid jobs in their relatives' or friends' restaurants. Worse still, most of them were working illegally and would seldom stay long abroad but instead would return to their home village and work in Hong Kong again. Some of them managed to settle abroad, but individual cases of achievement or enrichment were rare.

Deng Fei-yang is an example of one of the village men who still lives in the Netherlands with formal citizenship. During my research period, he returned to the village on one of his occasional home visits. In my interview, he shows that he has been working as a migrant-labourer in the Netherlands since the early 1970s. He worked as a cleaner in a small canteen and eventually settled down in Holland with his own family. Above all, he discussed the subject as follows:

“To say that one can make good money in Netherlands is only something to say. The sun there is hot too. What we usually do also simply is working in relatives' restaurant. The people who turned out to be capable of opening ones' own business, to be frank, were very few. But, in the past, we really had nothing to do in the village. There were no factories and no development in the surrounding area. Yes, we could farm the land but it earned too little. If we went out, we at least got some job to do. Just like me, what I could earn there, to begin with, was only about one or two thousand Netherlands dollars. It of course was not a large amount there. But, if I send them back to my home, it could make a big improvement of my family living as our living during that time was so poor. And, it is true. Hoping to see more of the world or having more experiences in foreign country was a reason a man like me in the village to go to the Netherlands.”

As a consequence of the common rural-urban emigration trend, I was told that more and more Deng households in An He village employed new immigrants from rural Mainland China to cultivate their land. Later, they simply rented their farmlands out or even left them fallow. Some of the people who came to do farm work or rented their farmland also rented their houses and lived with their own families in the village.⁸ Among the Dengs, an exceptional person who still undertakes his own cultivation is Uncle Xiang whose life history has been briefly discussed before. He could not help frequently complaining about the present condition of agricultural production as being overwhelming hard and the earnings increasingly diminishing. “It is not enough to feed a bird!” was what Uncle Xiang ultimately said to describe the current depressed agricultural conditions in Hong Kong.

V. Embourgeoisment and class differentiation

According to oral histories and ethnographic findings, industrialisation and

⁸ It should be noted that these late residents from the external migrations from Mainland China never held the status as “indigenous inhabitants” in the New Territories in accordance to the official definition. The same was true for the later but much more abundant numbers of residents in the New Territories arising from the internal migration from the urban population. Both in the official category and administration the term was simply ‘general’ inhabitants in Hong Kong under the general colonial governance. In other words, whilst the colonial policy of indirect rule indeed covered the whole area of the New Territories, British colonial rule in practice was applied in a highly selective and partial way. Consequently, both the ‘general’ colonial administrations for the urban population and the ‘special’ colonial administration for the “indigenous inhabitants” appeared in the same place of the New Territories where politically and jurisdictionally they were supposed to have only the ‘special form of rule.’

metropolitanisation processes in Hong Kong incessantly overwhelmed to shape and re-shape the living environment and strategies of the Dengs in An He village. Throughout the past several decades, the British colonial government also directly undertook more public projects to develop the New Territories and added various new infrastructures in the neighbourhood. Subsequently, the main footpath to the outside world was enlarged and paved. Many trees and ponds were removed to provide more space for public areas and a transportation network. Buses and other public traffic commuted to the village and intensified communication with the outside world. The little natural stream of the village was artificially straightened and channels installed. Water pipes were built in the community and private taps were installed in their households. An electricity system was extended to the residences and various electric appliances like light bulbs, electronic cookers, radios, televisions and air conditioning steadily became common in their daily life.

Most members of the post-war generations in the village also became wagedworkers in manufacturing factories or salary men or women in the business sector, and had no experience in agricultural cultivation at all. Furthermore, ancestral lands had been transformed into lucrative commodities in the property market with great demands resulting from rapid urban and industrial expansion; land was no longer just a

means of production for agriculture as it had been before. Through selling or renting out their land, many Deng households in An He village obtained strikingly substantial improvements in their economic conditions and even became extremely well to do.

In this regard, I was told in the field that Deng Bao-cai, a household head, who was over 65 years old, is now the wealthiest *nouveau riche* in the village. He had at times received huge amounts of money as official compensation for the resumption of his ancestral farmland. Even though he seldom told others the actual amount he earned from his land, his fellow villagers conservatively estimated that in just his latest deal with the government, he should have gained official compensation of about twenty million Hong Kong dollars. His accumulated household fortune by now has probably exceeded thirty or forty million Hong Kong dollars at least. Additionally, Deng Bao-cai in the village holds six ancestral houses with three units that he regularly leases at about \$5,000 to \$6,000 per month. Four of them are currently being renovated in order to re-build them into larger two and three-storeyed houses containing six units each for the rental market.

On the other hand, the official Small House Policy allows indigenous males in the New Territories to construct one premium-free village house during their lives.⁹ I was also told in the field that Deng Tuo-cheng, one of the village leaders in An He village,

recently purchased official land rights or, *Ding Quans*, a native term, from his kinsmen at a high price for the purposes of his private property business. After he successfully bought enough rights from his fellows, he pooled them together and carried out a large property investment to develop a residential complex with eight, three-storeyed and extremely elegant houses, a special car park for each unit and a well-decorated surrounding wall on an abandoned farmland in close vicinity to the village. Two more powerful indigenous Deng males in the village joined together to use the same method to undertake a similar property investment as well. The new residential units from these two property projects were priced on average at about two million Hong Kong dollars each but they were still quickly sold out.

To be sure, ethnographic materials indicate that the indigenous Dengs in An He village cannot all be compared with Deng Bao-cai who gained so much from his ancestral estate or the three exceptionally powerful kinsmen who made so much profit from their landed investments. However, most of them for certain enjoy considerable rental incomes from their ancestral estates and/or their special land rights to build a premium-free small house. In other words, they have commonly become “rent-cultivators”, instead of “crop-cultivators”, on their land or, rather, they rely more on rent than on crops. This situation describes the particular local context; the existing

⁹ Please refer to Chapter 1 for detail.

complex physical settings and demographic patterns in their village. Their lifestyle has been fundamentally transformed and their material, cultural pursuits emulate the lifestyle of the upper class. For instance, some households have owned private cars for many years. Throughout their social intercourse and occasional communal banquets, they frequently emulate the cultural tastes of the wealthier circles in Hong Kong and drink Western red wine. In their private practices, they have also taken up such leisure pursuits as collecting expensive plants or flowers to decorate the home or garden, keeping expensive breeds of dog or cats as pets, owning high-quality hi-fi or televisions for audio and visual entertainment and buying various fashionable items with famous brand names.

However, there are indications that the rapid commodification of their land with a highly lucrative economic return has not only provided them with affluent lifestyles, but it has also caused domestic disputes or interpersonal conflicts. Their household stories also shows that violent arguments over family property, matters of division in particular, are increasingly common and can last from generation to generation. Domestic disputes, which ended with lawsuits among household members, are quite numerous too. For example, the Dongs in An He village commonly admired Deng Tuo-cheng as a good village leader. But, they also recognised that he once quarreled

with his two brothers on the matter of their shared family property left from two generations ago and that they subsequently had hired lawyers to deal with their case. In effect, his two brothers are so alienated from him that both often openly criticise him and show no respect to him as the village leader in the community. Occasionally, some of the other villagers also privately complain about his abuse of power for his own land interests.

Deng Chun-li, a middle-aged indigenous woman of about 45, has been out of the village since her marriage many years ago. However, in my interview, she revealed that a fellow villager unrightfully seized some of her deceased father's properties. Her side of the story is: when her deceased father was still alive, he had by verbal agreement, allowed this fellow and his family to occupy one of his houses on the condition that they had to help him to pay the official land taxes. But, since her father died, they claimed that house to be their property. Eventually, the District Office also supported this family's case as they were the actual taxpayers.

Zhang A-rao, a landless young widow in the village, passed away about ten years ago. Her close contemporaries in the village recalled that during her lifetime she had often complained about her fellow villagers cheating her husband of his family property through gambling. Once, she even went to the District Office for assistance

threatening them with suicide. Finally, the District Office intervened and helped her to get back some of her husband's family property through mediation.

The land disputes are so many and varied that it is impossible to detail all of them here. The following chapters also provide more case studies, so the issue need not be discussed at length in the present chapter. But, it is necessary to point out that the possession or dispossession of landed property has obvious ramifications with important social and economic effects. In the first place, the current circumstance on the ground indicates that there is now a clear class boundary between the indigenous Dengs and the other-surnamed people in the village. For instance, Lin Yue-e, an aged woman about 60 years old, has been a tenant-household in the village for over 30 years. In my interview, she showed her general resentment with a cynical smile about the dominant indigenous Dengs in the village as follows:

“Their destinies are good! They are given with land [family property and fortune from succession]! They do not need to work for money! Just their rental earnings are enough for them to enjoy their life very much. All of them are landlords now!”

Among the Dengs in the village, this situation has produced equally obvious and intensive class differences and resentments as well. For instance, one of the most common topics throughout their daily conversations revolves around their houses with

frequent comparisons and competition in both the quantitative and qualitative senses. Having or lacking a respectable house has become an increasingly important issue to them as a house is critical to ones' social status in the community. For example, Deng Qui-ren is an uneducated middle-aged with a heavy stammer in the village. He does construction work and has been employed by many fellow kinsmen to build their new houses. His own residence in the village however, is simply an old village house, which he shares with his two brothers. He hated his current situation and took it as a family disgrace. He had hoped for a long time, to gain a new more stylish house through his connection to the Ding Quan. He also had developed a clear plan in his mind of how to build it and frequently dreamed of how many economic advantages he could obtain if his plan came true. However, he never collected enough capital to pay for the construction to realise his plan. Rather than having nothing, he recently and unwillingly decided to sell his *Ding Quan* to the village leader. Although he earned one hundred and fifty thousand Hong Kong dollars for selling his *Ding Quan*, he could not hide his deep disappointment and repeated his original but unachievable plan as follows:

“Yes! I failed to speak well and learned no words. But, I am not stupid. At least, I would not be like my foolish brothers who had education but never thought about how to use his *Ding Quan*. Indeed, if I had capital, my whole household would not be stuck in this fucking old house. And, I should already live in a new house and earn much rent. Then, I could use

my earning as my capital to build another new house and so on. Then, that is me who goes to buy others' Ding Quan and ask others to build house for him. How come I will be so poor. How come I only have one fucking word: 'poverty' for my life and fail to 'speak louder' in the village?"

Discussion: the complexity of Chinese village community

The picture of village change in the New Territories presented in this chapter may be partial and may even contain some exaggerations as people may use the retrospection of the past to make their own points about the present. However, this picture does work to highlight some existing important conceptual themes for the study of Chinese village community in and about the New Territories my fieldwork research intends to confirm. In the first place, the local histories in the present case indicate that Chinese village community in the New Territories is never a changeless, totally self-perpetualising being as some orthodox interpretations maintain.¹⁰ On the contrary, their continuity must be historically situated and contingently enabled, depending on how people undertake their different living struggles throughout different historical conjunctures.¹¹ The actual circumstance of a Chinese village community also must be a congeries of multiple living experiences or, in Pasternak's idiom, a "polyphony" (1972, p. 159) instead of one uniform cultural model. Even in

¹⁰ For example, Freedman (1985 & 1963), Potter (1969) and R. Ng (1969). For details please refer to Chapter 2.

¹¹ For example, R. Waston (1985), Chiu & Hung (1997) and Chun (2000). For details please refer to

this one case, there are many complexities and numerous significant variances at different aspects. People frequently exist with their different personal stories with different historical senses. Just as Fernand Braudel pointed out,

“Men [should be put into people now!] can never be reduced to one personality who fits into an acceptable simplification; though many people have pursued this false hope. No sooner has one approached even the simplest aspect of his life than one finds his customary complexity there too.” (1985, p. 562)

In the present case, as in the earlier past agricultural era, people generally obtained almost no real advantage from their membership in the so-called most landed and privileged clan of the Five Great Clans in the New Territories. Most of them needed instead to get by through various marginal economic practices due to their landless condition. Their common status in practical term profoundly remained to be poor peasants and deprived tenants. During the Japanese occupation, there were extreme hardships for people as a result of horrible starvation, forced migration and irrecoverable collapses of households. Even after the whole event has passed for more than a half of century, vivid historical memories still continued to exist in the locality. The violent impacts of war remain as the most horrifying encounters or deepest injuries in people’s lives. Since the post-war rapid development of Hong Kong, there

have been fundamental social and economic transformations of the village community. The past agricultural practices with which people had closely lived with their land and directly made their material life from land rapidly declined to become a highly marginal occupation. In effect, the indigenous residents have been detached from their land. Most of them migrated out of their village to live in urban Hong Kong and even foreign countries. They have also sold or rented their ancestral estates and the majority are now landlords. However, R. Watson is absolutely correct in this regard: class is an essential dimension in the practice of community life.¹² Whilst their possession of land from family succession and/or their own creations have enabled them to adopt upper class cultural lifestyles, long and deep domestic disputes among themselves over landed advantage at the same time are increasingly frequent and violent. Whilst some of them have even succeeded in becoming extremely wealthy or/and affluent property developers, class differences and grievances meanwhile become increasingly obvious and thick not only with outsiders, but also with their poorer village fellows.

On top of that, the impact of British colonialism upon the transformation of local lives was obviously consequential. Under their different public projects and specific policies, their political rule frequently penetrated into the Chinese village community

¹² Please refer to Chapter 2 for details.

and continued to create new living environments and practices for the people. Accordingly, the extent to which the British colonial rule in their own terms had been “indirect” or “non-interventionistic” of course is highly problematic and, as what have now been commonly maintained by many existing researches, is fundamentally misleading.¹³ In particular, Chiu and Hung’s argument that, behind their mask of indirect rule, colonial rule is an ultimate moderniser is pertinent.¹⁴ There are indications that the general absorption of village people into the general post-war development of Hong Kong in the present case by and large came through the stimulation from British colonial rule. In the next chapter, I try to reveal some more actual socio-political features of the New Territories under British colonial rule.

¹³ For example, Nelson (1969), Chun (1985, 1990 & 2000) and Chiu & Hung (1997). For details please refer to Chapter 2.

¹⁴ Please refer to Chiu & Hung (1997) or my brief review of their work in Chapter 2.

Illustrations: Pictures of An He Village



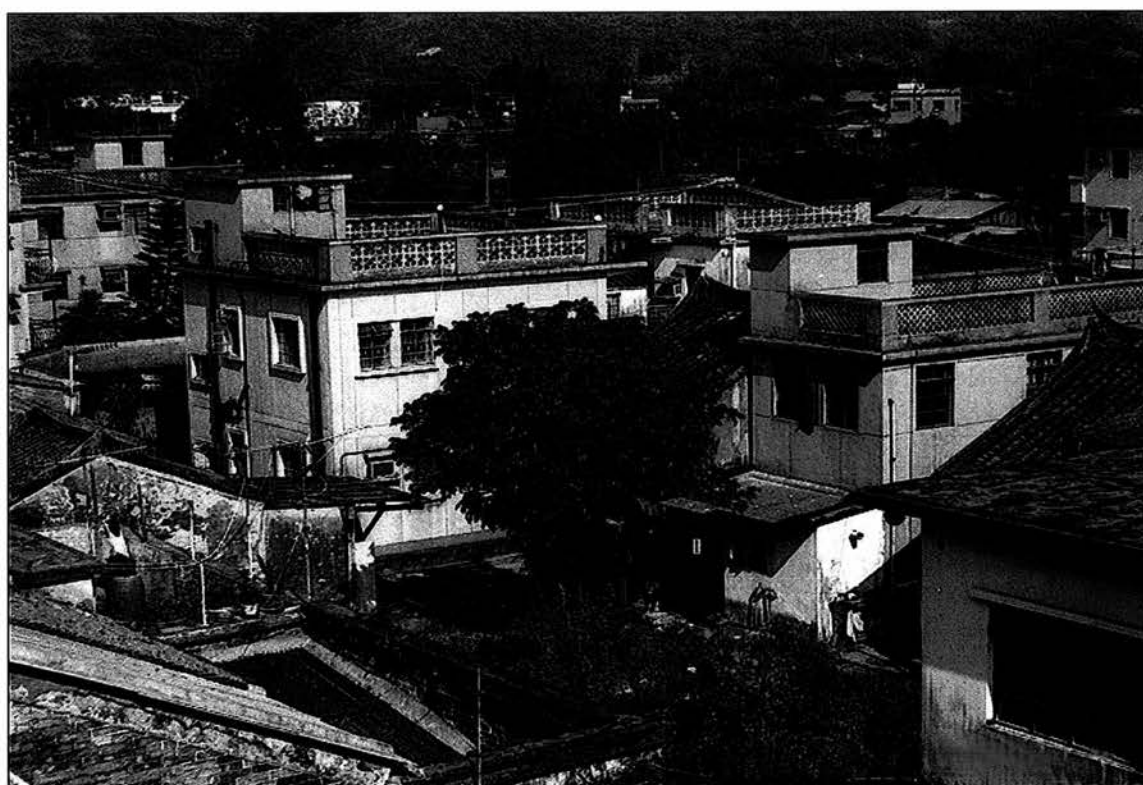
Picture 1.The Twisting Pavement to An He Village



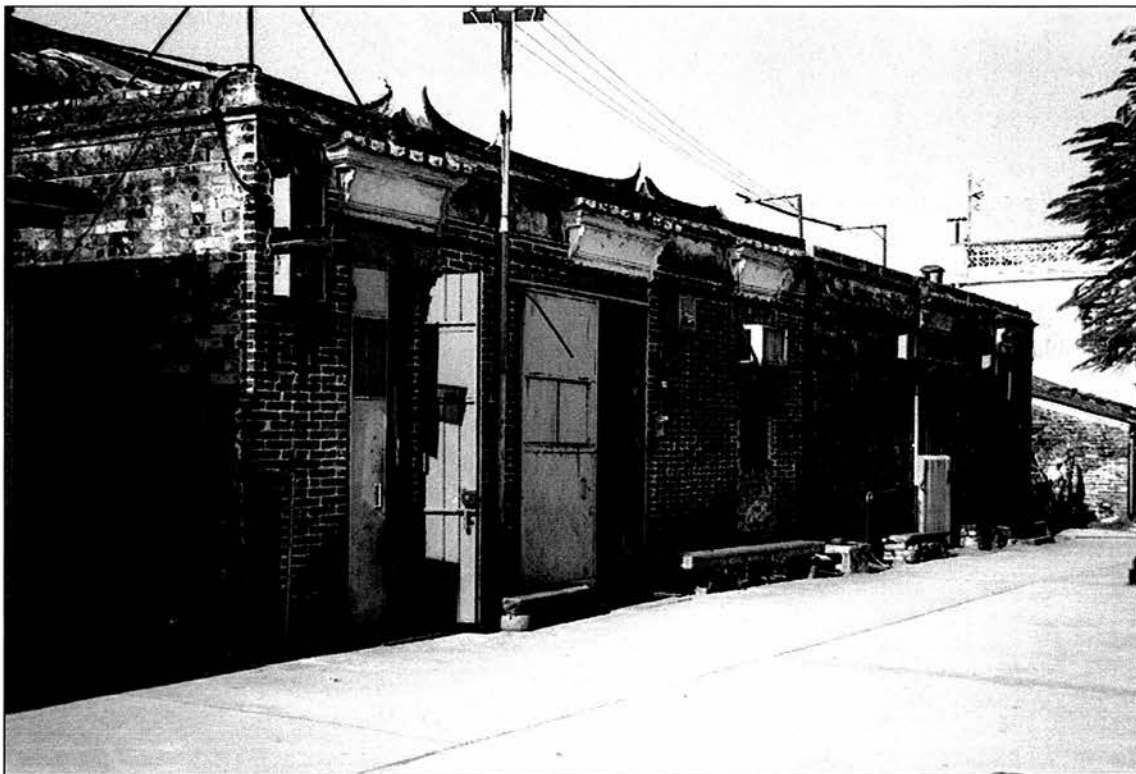
Picture 2. The Gateway of An He Village



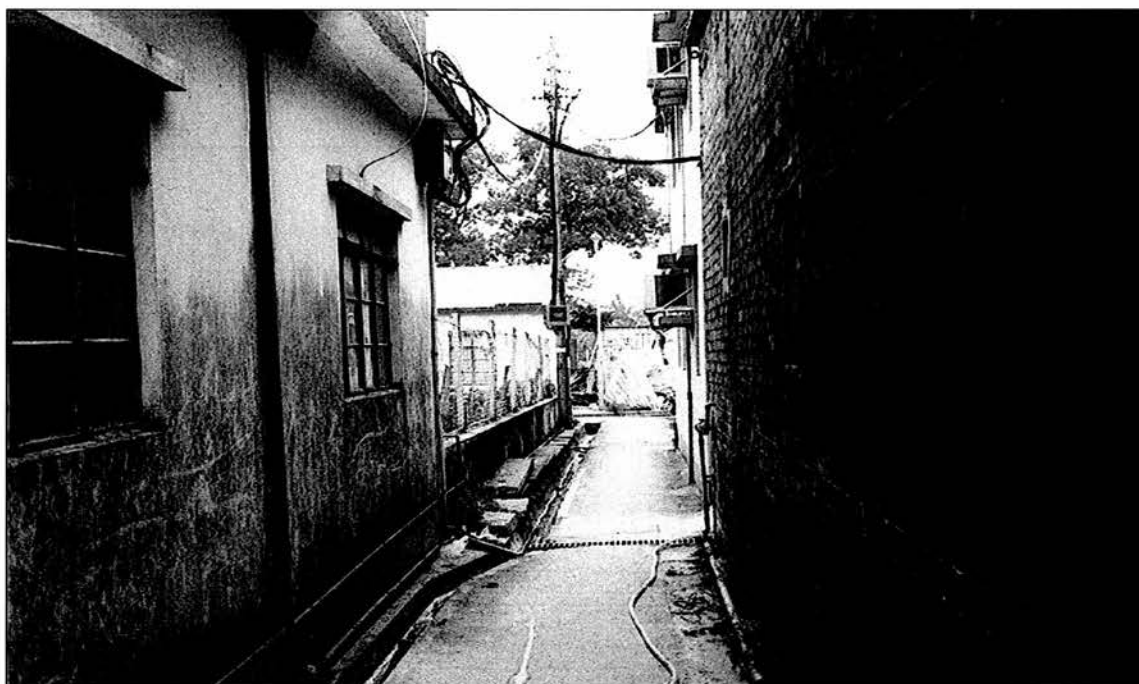
Picture 3. The Dengs' Ancestral Hall in An He Village



Picture 4. An Internal View of An He Village



Picture 5. The Open Area at the Gateway of An He Village



Picture 6. An Internal Lane in An He Village



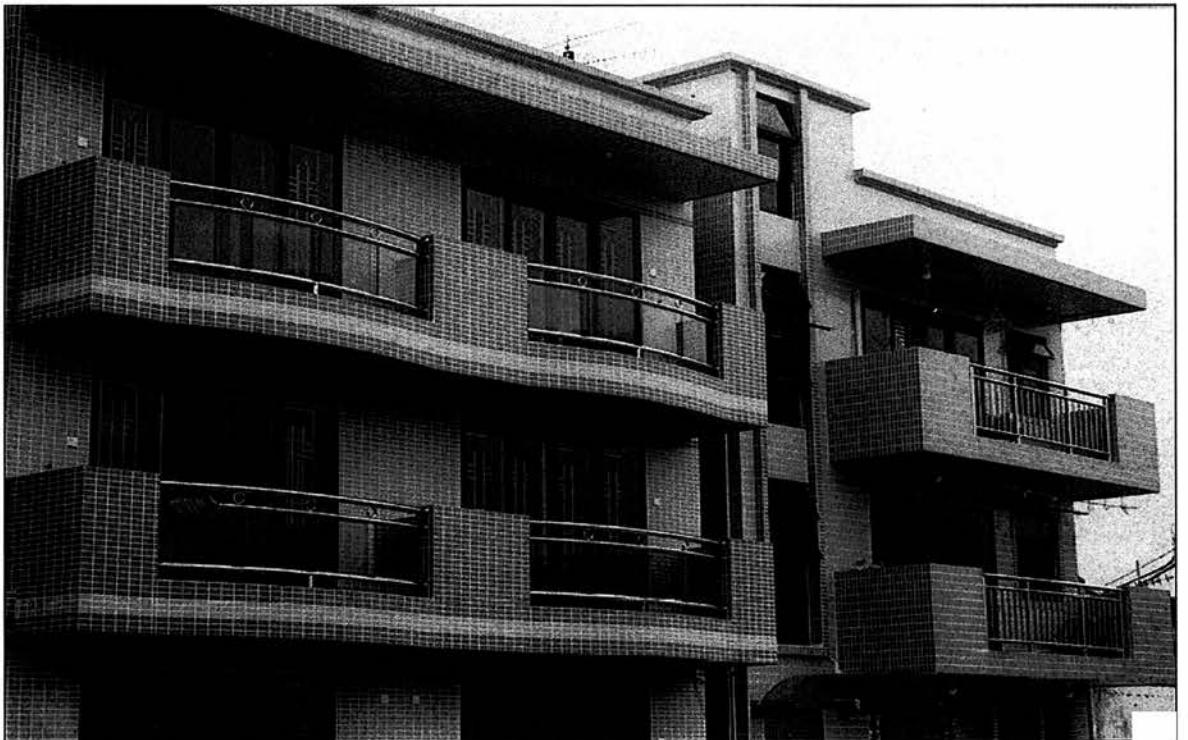
Picture 7. An Old House in An He Village



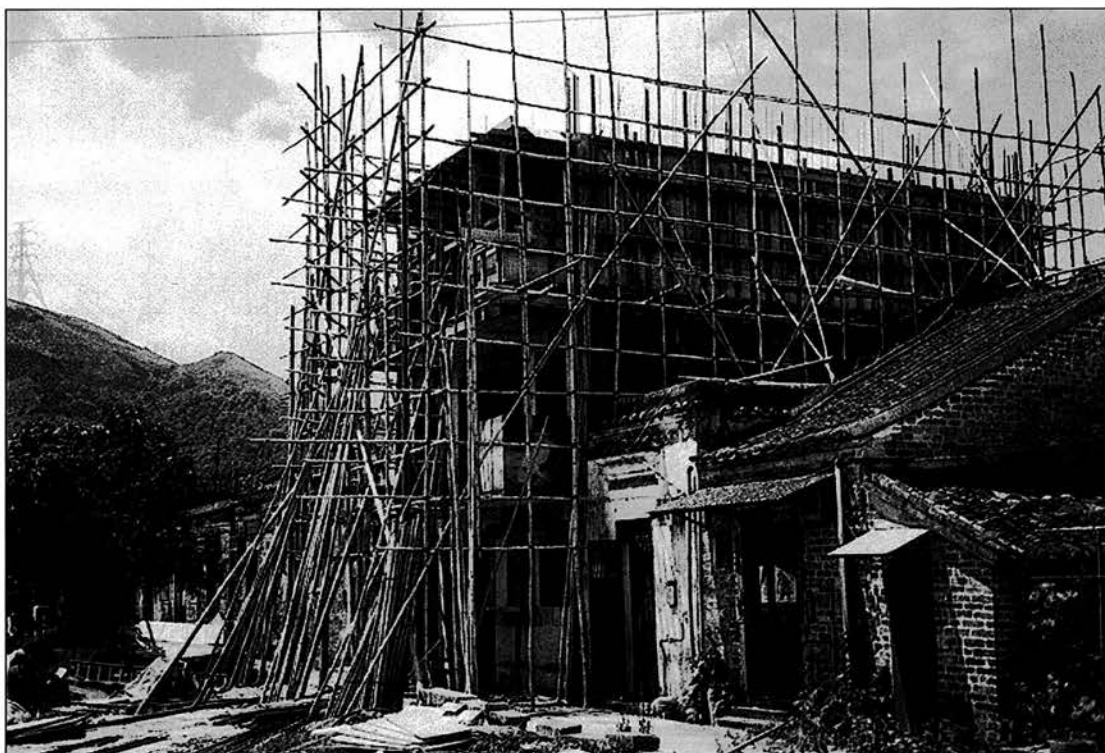
Picture 8. A Crude Residential Structure in An He Village



Picture 9. An Earlier Example of a Renovated House in An He Village



Picture 10. Later Examples of Renovated Houses in An He Village



Picture 11. A Current Renovated Project in An He Village



Picture 12. New Deng Houses for Sale Located in the Extended Village Area in An He Village



Picture 13. A Farmland in An He Village



Picture 14. An Abandoned Farmland in An He Village

Chapter 5: Chinese lineage practices and British colonial rule

Introduction

Perhaps the most vexing issue in the study of Chinese village communities in the New Territories is an adequate understanding of the place of kinship, particularly the subtle transformations which occurred during the colonial era. By focusing on the history of the lineage of Dengs in Fu Mei Au, this chapter tries to identify and specify how kinship plays a part in cultural, economic and political arenas. The specific topics I examine here include:

- 1) essential kinship terms in lineage practice,
- 2) patrilineal linkage and internal segmentation,
- 3) supra-village agnatic connections and corporation; and
- 4) male-only leadership in local politics.

I highlight how pre-colonial Chinese kinship is ideologically and in practice extremely patrilineal and patriarchal. Far from undermining them, the British had come to reinforce and spread these features to other areas of social life. In addition, the Chinese patriarchs also made use of them in pursuit of their own interests. In the final

section of this chapter, I identify some empirical and conceptual features of the mutual constitution of patriarchal and intrusive colonial rule resulting in the creation of a subtle but complicit structure in the socio-political governance of the New Territories. To begin with, however, I use a keyword approach after the manner of Raymond William (1988) to examine some of the fundamental discursive ideas surrounding Chinese lineages.

I. Essential kinship terms in lineage practice¹

Zu, *Tang* and *Fang*: these three Chinese words are usually translated into “ancestor”, “hall” and “room” in English. These terms have had a long history in the Chinese language and have developed a wide range of meanings and extensions. Subsequently, not only have these terms become extremely vexing under Chinese kinship vocabulary, but they have also produced many critical discursive effects in Chinese lineage practices.

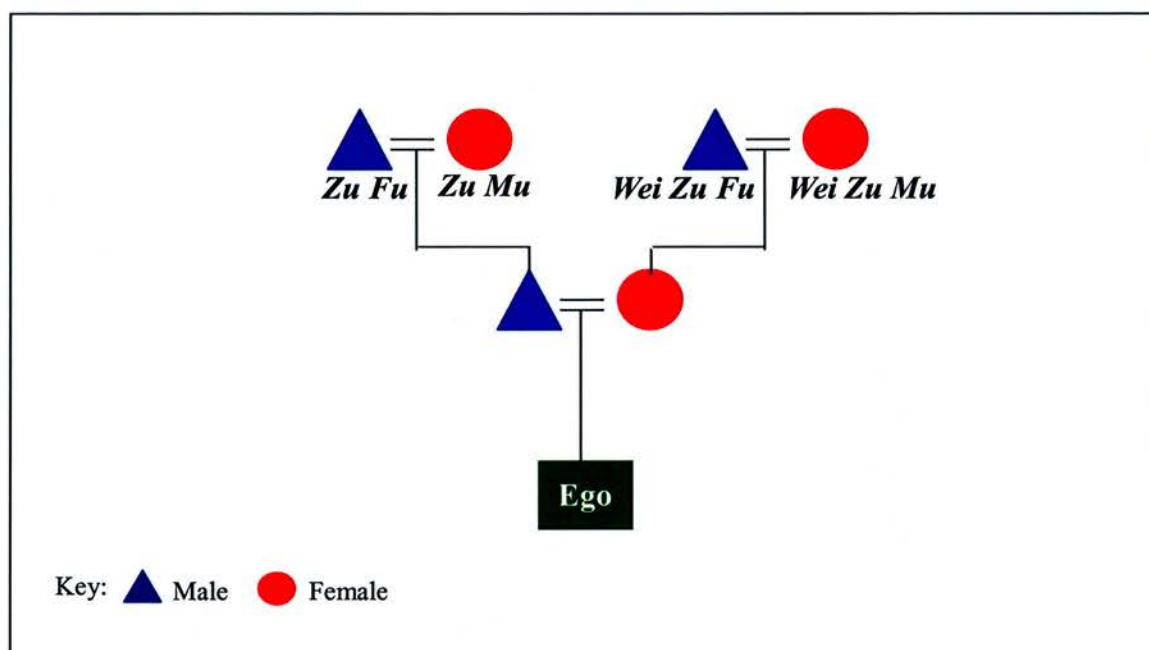
Shuo Wen Jie Zi, the first Chinese dictionary by *Xu Sheng* (A. D. 58-149),

¹ In addition to my primary ethnographic findings, the materials used in this section draw upon both classical and contemporary Chinese dictionaries, viz: *Shuo Wen Cong Kan* (Gao, M. (Ed.), 1972), *Shuo Wen Jie Zi Zhi* (Duan, [Wang, Y. F. (Ed.)], 1973), *Kan Xi Zi Dian* (Gao, S. F., Ling & Zheng (Eds.), 1982), *Zhong Zheng Xing Yin Yi Zhong He Tai Zi Dian* (Gao, S. F. & Wang. (Eds.), 1982), *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (Xu Sheng [Xu, S. (Ed.)], 1985), *Chang Yong Zi Yin Xing Yi Yong* (Ding, Zhang & Cui. (Eds.), 1998) and *Han Yu Da Zi Dian* (Xu, Z. S. (Ed.), 1990). I also use references from Chun’s cultural anthropological research into these three Chinese genealogical terms (Chun, 1985, pp. 141-149 & pp. 265-291) and Lei H, Q’s etymological studies of the word *Zu* (Lei, 2000, pp.188-198).

indicates that, etymologically, *Zu* refers to the shrine for ancestral worship. But this primary meaning of *Zu* is not in common usage, being mainly restricted to some ancient Chinese texts. The commentary on *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* by *Duan Yu-cai* (A. D. 1735-1815) also shows that this word is normally used to indicate “originality”. By extension, it has come to mean “beginning”, “initial”, “first”, “origin of people”, “source of thing”, “creator”, “founder” and, most usually, “ancestor”.

However, *Zu* is gendered, and carries a definite patriarchal meaning. It is a formal Chinese kinship term that refers to one’s grandfather or one’s general patrilineal forebears. Even though it is applicable to some relatives from ones’ mother’s side, the dominant Chinese kinship model uses the derogatory prefix of *Wei* to make the differences obvious. For example, the formal Chinese address to one’s father’s father and mother is *Zu Fu* and *Zu Mu* while that of one’s mother’s father and mother is “*Wei*” *Zu Fu* and “*Wei*” *Zu Mu*. *Wei* literally means “external” or “outside” but contextually implies “less imitate”, “indirect” or “lower-graded” kin here. Importantly, to use *Zu* as a verb connotes a strong sense of power and has developed meanings like “worship”, “learning”, “following”, “obeying” and “legislation”, thereby implying “the respectable”, “the paradigm”, “the model”, “the rule” and “the law” (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: *Zu* and *Wei Zu*: a kinship diagram



These literal meanings of *Zu* are neglected by local Chinese people in kinship discourse. My fieldwork definitely indicates that Chinese people use *Zu* to refer to their ancestors in the patrilineal and patriarchal sense. But they rarely employ this term to address their grandfather or general patrilineal forebears. Rather, they mainly adopt it to identify the eponymous ancestor who provided them with important communal estate and goods. Furthermore, *Zu* is so literal that people seldom use it except in a formal context. Instead, they usually adopt the colloquial term *Tai Gong* (the greatest grandfather) to address their *Zu* (eponymous ancestors), which obviously carries a rather direct patrilineal and patriarchal meaning.²

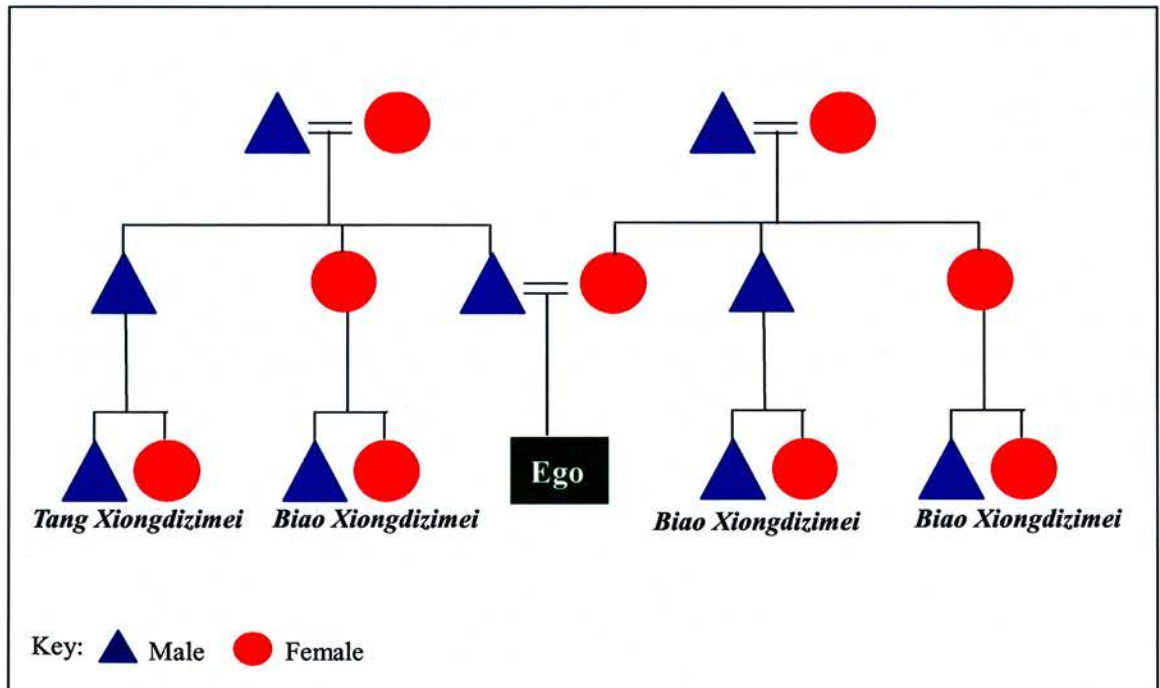
² In order to come close to the way people usually speak, the following discussion in this chapter

Tang was an architectural term before it came to carry its several present meanings in its usage in Chinese kinship. *Shou Wen Jie Zi* defines *Tang* as *Dian* (the palace). But, Duan comments, *Tang* also has other specific meanings. It can refer to “a square”, “a forecourt”, “the main room within a house”, “the lobby within a building”, and “a court of law” or “an administrative bureau” in the past dynastic government. More generally, it can refer to a “hall” and other similar architectural buildings like “public building” and “meeting place” specifically for collective activity or open assembly. When used as an adjective, it can imply “huge”, “brilliant”, “smart” and “respectable” by reference to its common architectural features.

However, *Tang* as a kinship term, like *Zu*, carries a clearly gendered patrilineal and patriarchal meaning. It is a formal term to indicate one’s lateral relatives on one’s father’s side under the same patrilineal ancestors. For example, the formal Chinese address of one’s father’s brother’s children is “*Tang*” *Xiongdizimei* (siblings) but one’s father’s sisters’ children and one’s mother’s brother’s children are “*Biao*” *Xiongdizimei*. *Biao* literally means “superficial” or “apparent” but, like *Wei*, imply “less imitate”, “indirect” or “lower-graded” kin here (see Figure 5.2).

continues to use *Tai Gong* instead of *Zu*.

Figure 5.2: *Tang* and *Biao*: a kinship diagram



Beyond these common usages, *Tang* as a kinship term can refer to the agnatic corporation that has control over a communal estate from *Tai Gong*. In this regard, my fieldwork indicates that while some of the *Tangs* possess a physical hall others are purely imaginary construct. Nevertheless, the lineage group at least has established their *Tang* with a special title and they use it to mark their entitlement to the communal estate from a named *Tai Gong*.³ Moreover, this entitlement normally entails an indivisible and inalienable principle according to local rule, whereby it remains in the collective ownership of the lineage members through patrilineal succession from

³ Usually, this title composes of two Chinese words and makes it like “X X *Tang*” in practice. Real examples will be given in the following ethnographic account.

generation to generation.

Fang in its primary sense was also an architectural term before it became a kinship term. *Shou Wen Jie Zi* defines *Fang* as “*Shi Zai Bang*” (side-room). Duan comments that the term specifically refers to the rooms on the eastern and western sides of the house. However, *Fang* in the Chinese language has numerous common extensions. For instance, in the privacy of the home, the term is now used to represent “sexuality”, “the “wife” and “concubine”. It can also be adopted to indicate any specific rooms within the house and, by implication, component parts like “organ of the human body”, “professional division”, and “official department”, and various types of roomed structures like “apartment”, “factory”, “church”, and even “honeycomb”.

By the same token, *Fang* as a kinship term means “agnatic branch” within a lineage. Amongst the Dengs of An He village, this term in their kinship vocabulary is sometimes used to refer to any agnatic branch at different generation levels or, rather more narrowly, any specific “household” within a lineage. However, *Fang* as a kinship term frequently carries a strong sense of the private and refers to the domestic realm. The estate in a *Fang* also comes under some different rules from the communal one in a *Tang*. In the first place, the rights to the estate belong to the individual and

these are alienable rights in practice. They can also be equally divided among the holders' descendants. But, here the rule of patrilineal succession remains. Even when a specific *Fang* fails to provide a male heir, the estate can be passed down to the holder's nearest kinsman in the lineage and become that kinsman's property according to *The Law of Great Qing*.

Above all, these three pre-colonial Chinese words in the field of kinship have survived throughout the British colonial period. Furthermore, the specific land entitlements vis-à-vis these three Chinese kinship terms obtained new legality from the British colonial codification of them into law under their policy of indirect rule special for the New Territories.⁴ The following section examines how these three Chinese kinship terms work in the context of a specific lineage during the colonial period.

II. Patrilineal linkage and internal segmentation

The Dengs in An He village claim a long genealogy and their common ancestor Deng Xin-xing as their *Tai Gong*.⁵ By reproducing and giving social support to a

⁴ Please refer to chapter 1 for details.

⁵ The genealogy the Dengs in An He village keep for themselves starts its record from a common ancestor who first arrived the New Territories during the *Northern Song Dynasty* (960-1127). It also details an unbroken lineal succession from generation to generation up to now. In total, it covers about a thousand years. Most importantly, the information kept in their genealogy provides various essential details regarding their lineage development. Not only the cycle of each generation, but also the

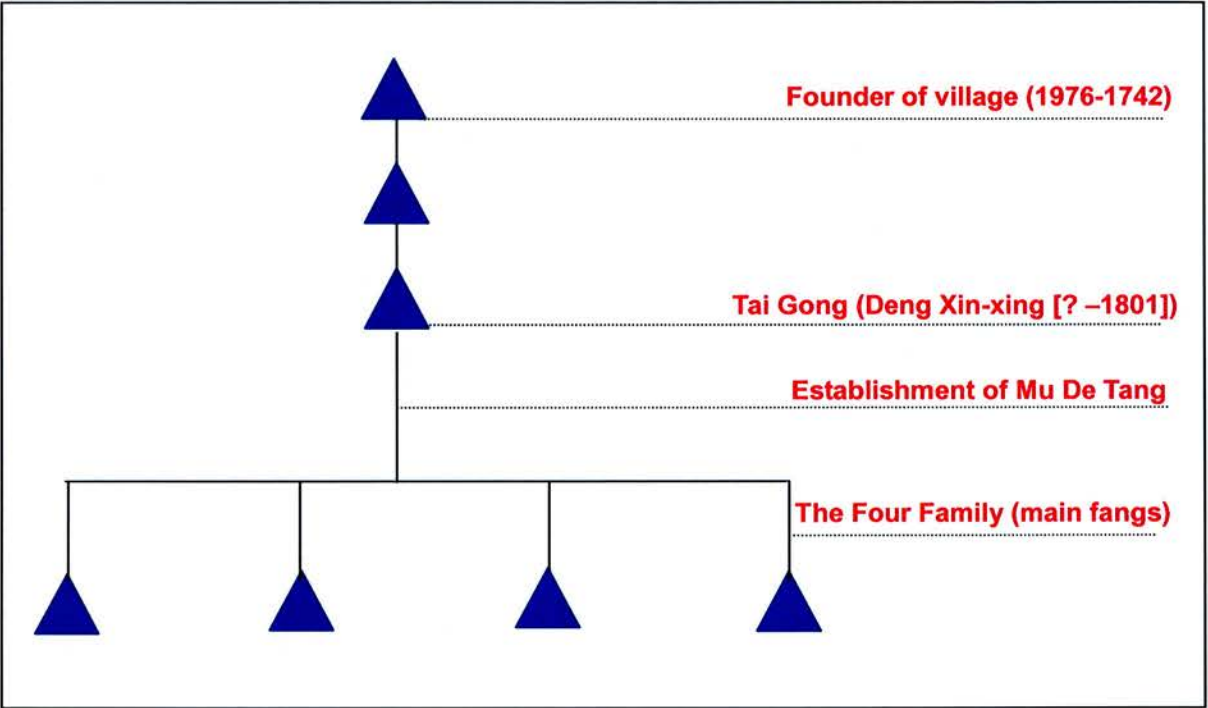
common genealogical history that traces them back to this ancestor, the Dengs see each other as kinsmen related through patrilineal links and generally consider themselves to be ‘brothers’ with the same consanguinity. Specifically, their genealogy and interpretations indicate that their *Tai Gong* Deng Xin-xing (? -1801) belonged to the eighteenth generation in the clan⁶ with a seven-generation distance to their existing twenty-fifth generation up to the year 2000. During his lifetime, Deng Xin-xing took a wife from the *Liaos* and had four sons with her. Most importantly, his grandfather during the *Qing Dynasty*, (1679-1742) was not only a respectable member of the literati, bestowed with the official honour of *Gong Sheng* (junior gentry), but was also the founder of the An He village. The lineage branched out and went on to establish the *Mu De Tang* line with considerable communal estate and goods. Since his four sons also had their own families and the lineal succession continued to branch out, the lineage subsequently reformed into four main *Fangs* and claimed for themselves *The Four Families* (see Figure 5.3).

Amongst the Dengs of An He, their lineage practice accompanies by other

biographies of important ancestors are well documented. During my fieldwork period, I was told that they normally collect the number of male births and death in their lineage for each year and formally append the new data onto their genealogy about every ten-years, and mark this with a large-scale collective ceremony.

⁶ Jack, Potter (1969) has made a useful distinction between “lineage” and “clan”. Namely, a lineage refers to a group of people descended in one line from a common ancestor with close agnatic corporation and solidarity whereas a clan refers to the general whole of a group of lineages sharing with the same blood relationship but being less solidary and non-corporate in character. In the present research, I follow his distinction when I use these two terms.

5.3: The establishment of *Mu De Tang* in An He village: a kinship diagram



non-genealogical features. In fact, I frequently found that many people had only fragmentary or extremely rough notions of genealogical development. Throughout my investigation into their kinship practice, the most usual direct response from them was: “It is very complicated”, “I can’t remember much”, “I only know a few”, “I need to check with the genealogy”, “You should ask the elders” and so on and so forth.

In short, they considered themselves to be somehow patrilineally related whilst not necessarily being clear on the historical background of their lineage. It was mainly in cases of dispute or potential conflict over the resources held by an agnatic corporation over communal estates and goods that they would make occasional

inquires into their specific patrilineal linkage as shown in their genealogy and then take this as the ultimate point of reference.

From the inception of British colonial rule, land legislation and administration required Chinese people to have *Si Li* (managers) who were responsible for the communal estate. The Dengs in An He village began the practice of regularly appointing four kinsmen to take up these official positions, on an agnatic basis. In practice, they had already decided that each of the four main *Fangs* in their lineage should have one male representative to act as the official *Si Lis* (*managers*) of their communal estate and goods in the *Mu De Tang*. Thus, in total they had four *Si Lis* and normally recruited them through regular turns among the male household heads every four years. The *Si Lis* were also in charge of various essential tasks concerning the agnatic corporation. For instance, they not only had to work out their main income from the collection of rent from the communal estate in the *Mu De Tang*, but they also had to deal with the main expenditure from their regular collection of monies for worship and sacrifices for the *Tai Gong*. In addition to these necessary routines, they had to regularly bank the rental to earn interest and to hold public meetings to allow their kinsmen to see the accounts and to discuss their management of their collective affairs. Moreover, they had to annually figure out the total cash surplus their *Mu De*

Tang could earn from the communal estate and divide this equally amongst their kinsmen.

Nevertheless, amongst the Dengs, their lineage practice is fundamentally segmental and internally differentiated as well. The Dengs in An He village are not all necessarily under the *Mu De Tang* and do not all share the same communal estate and goods. In addition, there are two more *Tangs* in the village, namely *Zhen Hong Tang* and *Ri An Tang*. It is important to note that the lineage lines of these additional *Tangs* have become blurred due to their long co-existence with the *Mu De Tang* in the village. It is difficult for people from the *Mu De Tang* or these two *Tangs* to clearly recall their origins except for some highly generalised speculations. Nevertheless, there is a *de facto* acceptance of their co-existence as it is commonly presumed as a consequence from the decision of their *Tai Gong*. For instance, in a conversation with an elder from *Mu De Tang*, he discussed their internal inchoate lineage circumstances as follows

“They [the Dengs in *Zhen Hong Tang* and *Ri An Tang*] also are our brothers with the same surname of Dengs. And, they have been living in our village for many years. Some past elder said that they ‘joined in’ our village. Maybe they did something or passed through something before they lived in our village. But, ‘how’: I don’t know! Anyway, it should be something that happened during the age of our *Tai Gong*.”

As far as the current circumstances of these *Tangs* in the village are concerned, their

Figure 5.4: Internal differentiation among the Dengs in An He village

	<i>Mu De Tang</i>	<i>Zhen Hong Tang</i>	<i>Ri An Tang</i>	Total
Households	34 (87%)	3 (8%)	2 (5%)	39 (100%)
Male members	46 (79%)	9 (16%)	3 (5%)	58 (100%)

Source: census data from fieldwork up to 2000

population size is considerably less than the *Mu De Tang* (see Figure 5.4). But, similarly both have their own agnatic corporation over their own communal estate and goods along with their occasional collective worship for their own *Tai Gong*.

This lineage composition in An He village supports Faure’s view (1986). In his study of Chinese lineage practices, he suggested that genealogical linkage frequently is a matter of people’s own invocation and that invocation can be just about people’s right of settlement in the same community territory. It has no relevance to their property rights to the communal trusts organised around their different ancestral cults and estates, a subtle but common nuance in Chinese lineage practices. Faure elaborated his argument as follows:

“It is in the nature of the tracing of descent that every lineage can be considered to be a segment of a wider lineage if only an earlier ancestor can

be posited. ... Whether the genealogical linkage claimed is real or fictitious is beside the point for the purpose of lineage organisation: it matters only that members of the lineage are prepared to accept the linkage as real.” (1986, p.2)

“Most lineages, however, possess little beyond the rights of settlements. ... [S]egments of a wider lineage may share the rights of settlement in the same village without sharing an ancestral hall or conducting ancestral worship in common.” (ibid, p.7-8)

This lineage composition also indicates that, while the settlement development in An He village generally rests on some traceable or imaginative patrilineal linkages, its existing constitution as a ‘lineage-village’ is not simply a case of localised unilineal descent by natural growth.⁷ To put it in another way, the village is created through socially motivated affiliations between unilineal descent groups from the same clan in a specific historical conjuncture. This conforms with Judd’s observation that Chinese village communities show a “residentially structured predominance of agnatically related men in territorially based communities” (1994, p.580). In the next section, I will show how a similar organisation can be found at a higher-ordered geographical level above and beyond the immediate domain of An He village.

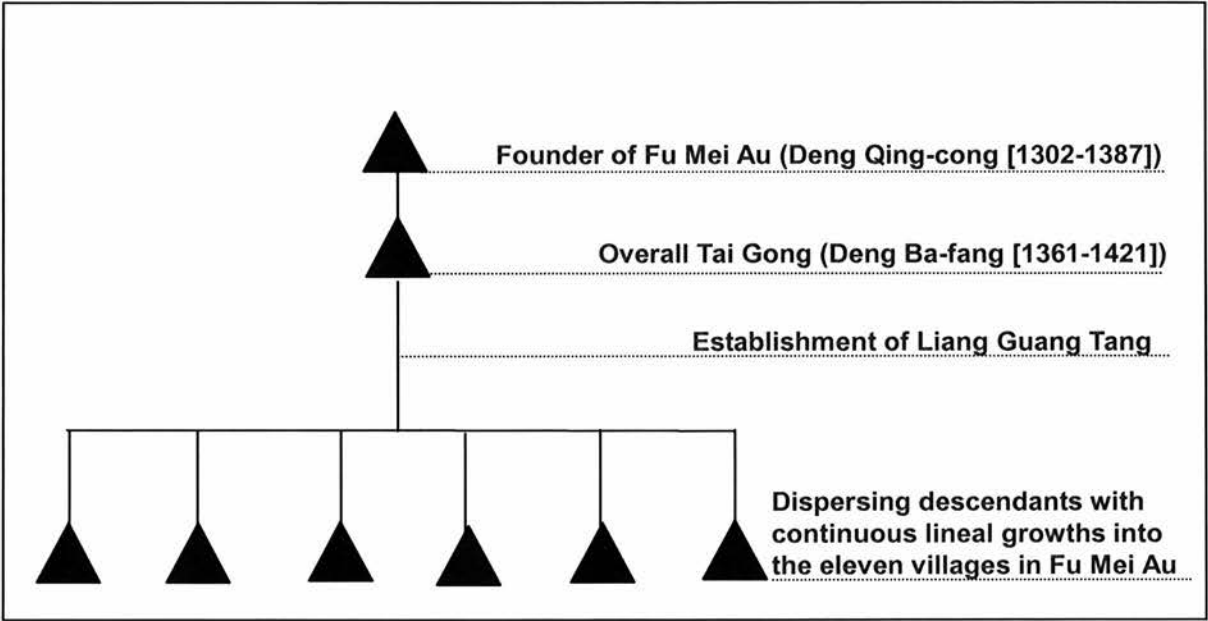
⁷ The term “lineage-village” has long been used for the discussion of rural Chinese society. Generally, it refers to the common interconnection between lineage and village made possible by localised unilineal descent. For details please refer to Freedman’s work (1958) from which this term was fully developed. However, Chun (1996) reflected upon this term and criticized it for neglecting the contextual specificities in the formation of Chinese village communities.

III. Supra-village connections and agnatic corporations

Despite their internal segmentation, the Dengs in An He village said they had a collective overall *Tai Gong* called *Deng Ba-fang*. By tracing an earlier common genealogical history from him, descendants articulated a patrilineal linkage with men from the other villages in Fu Mei Au and normally considered them to be their ‘brothers’. Specifically, according to their genealogy and the way they interpreted this, they said that Deng Ba-fang, their overall *Tai Gong* (1363-1421), was born in the sixth generation of their clan with a nineteen-generation distance before the current (in 2000) twenty-fifth generation. Deng Ba-fang was the first son of his father Deng Qing-cong (1302-1387 A.D.) who had been a powerful official in the government and eventually moved into Fu Mei Au through his purchases of lands and properties for his retirement. In his own marriage, he had six sons with his wife. Since his six sons also married, they continued to have male offspring after offspring, so much so that their male offspring subsequently dispersed into the eleven villages in Fu Mei Au and collectively founded the whole region as their common place of home. The localised clan in Fu Mei Au also consists of six large *Fangs* each with more branches and sub-branches and so on and so forth.

Most importantly, when Deng Ba-fang gained his father’s huge inheritance, he

Figure 5.5: The establishment of *Liang Guang Tang* in Fu Mei Au: a kinship Diagram



established a grandiose ancestral hall in his memory in Fu Mei Au.⁸ He also created a *Tang* called *Liang Guang Tang* to establish his father’s inheritance as the communal estate and goods for his male offspring (see Figure 5.5). In effect, all his male offspring in Fu Mei Au (including most certainly those in An He village) now have a share in the communal estates and goods from his great legacy of the *Liang Gunag Tang*. They also call him their *Big Tai Gong* or *Fu Mei Au Tai Gong* and at a supra-village level, they collectively undertake their higher-ordered agnatic corporate activities using Deng Bao-fang’s great legacy to them.

⁸ Please refer to Figure 4.1 in last chapter for the specific location of this general ancestral hall in Fu Mei Au.

Likewise, the Dengs in Fu Mei Au regularly appoint *Si Lis* (*managers*) to manage the communal estates and goods in their clan. In their case they prefer to formally recruit their *Si Lis* through regular public elections instead of taking regular turns among their kinsmen every four years. In this regard, Deng Yin-fu is one of their most senior *Si Lis*, in charge of management. As already mentioned, he is also the knowledgeable oral historian of their clan. Currently, he has acted in this high public position for his fellow kinsmen over 15 years and has also earned himself an informal but powerful title as the “*Big Boss*”. Throughout their supra-village public meetings and discussions, he is frequently the chief speaker representing their interests in matters of communal estates and goods. During one of my interviews with him, he showed that the accumulated assets of the communal estates and goods from the *Fu Mei Au Tai Gong* in their *Liang Guang Tang* currently included the following four items:

- 1) one bank account to the amount of HKD\$13,000,000 (about £1,000,000 in sterling);
- 2) eight three-storeyed village houses in two new residential towns;
- 3) two shops in a market town; and
- 4) more than twenty plots of farmlands in different locations

Furthermore, he added that the total annual rental income from these communal ancestral estates was about \$1,300,000 (about £100,000). The total annual expenditure on regular collective ancestral worship and other occasional ceremonies and banquets for the whole clan was around \$350, 000 (around £28,000). In total, the annual surplus of the communal account balance was about $\$1,300,000 - \$350,000 = \$950,000$ (about £72,000).

Moreover, the number of kinsmen under *Liang Guang Tang*, the shareholders of their agnatic corporation over the communal estate and goods from their *Fu Mei Au Tai Gong*, was currently around 700 heads of household. They did not however, have an established rule to regularly divide the annual surplus among themselves. Instead, they would normally let the surplus accumulate in their communal account, as public foundation monies. Only when these monies became abundant enough, would they start to consider the matter of how to divide it amongst their shareholders. The last time they had this communal sharing was ten years ago. The informant could not recollect the amount obtained from that particular communal sharing but he still clearly remembered that their method of distribution was 30% per each agnatic branch and 70% per each male head.⁹

⁹ This mixed method of distribution of communal fortune in the Chinese lineage practice is not normal. In later chapters I will show that the rather prevailing method remains one in which all is divided by branch.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out that the supra-village agnatic corporate control over such a set of considerable communal estates and goods create in themselves not only common interests and businesses, but also various internal mistrusts and disagreements. Deng Yin-fu complained that his fellow kinsmen had for a long time shown no concern over the affairs of *Liang Guang Tang* that they collectively shared. During his early participation in the management affairs of the community, not only was the attendance low but the proceedings were characterised by little input. Often only a few words were uttered during the proceedings, with no serious discussions or forceful arguments. Such lukewarm attitudes in the clan continued during the past two or three decades when their *Liang Guang Tang* made some handsome proceeds from the considerable official compensation for the development of lucrative properties on their ancestral land. This all happened however, at a time when Deng Yin-fu increasingly met with disagreements with fellow kinsmen concerning his management of their communal estates and goods. One time, Deng Yin-fu added he had been, on account of his fellow kinsmen's secret accusations, suddenly called in to testify before anti-corruption officials, regarding the communal accounts.

More recently, I observed that Deng Yin-fu's candidature in the latest round of

public elections unexpectedly met with an open and blunt attack from some of his kinsmen. Not only did one of his kinsmen nominate his son to compete against Deng Yin-fu but he also filed an open complaint letter against Deng Yin-fu's management on the day of the public vote in the ancestral hall. The objective of his complaint was to prevent Deng Yin-fu's candidature, as he was still under official investigation for corruption. On the publication of the letter, there were immediate and vehement objections and numerous forceful counter-arguments from some of the attendees in the ancestral hall. One of the attendees even angrily accused this open call as an unacceptable violation of their fundamental lineage rule:

“How can we be entitled to say: we can cancel one's right to his participation into the clan! As his surname is Deng, he is one of our members. He must have this right. It is absolutely unchangeable. Even if he is truly proved to be guilty for corruption, he still has this right for sure! If you hate him, if you don't trust him, you can vote against him. But, it is fucking ridiculous to ask us to follow your fucking call!”

The end result also was that the kinsman's son lost the election while Deng Yin-fu was successfully returned in his position.

Deng Yin-fu said that he expected the deep suspicions and various secret or open attacks from his fellow kinsmen and didn't care about them. But, he could not ignore the discontent from an increasingly common voice from his fellow kinsmen over the

ancestral business of their *Liang Guang Tang*. Namely, they formally or informally urged him to divide up more or even share the common foundation amongst the shareholders. In this regard, Deng Yin-fu angrily accused them of a lack of basic common sense and morality:

“They absolutely are all bad sons! ... Only considering their self-interest all the time. If we really share up our *Tai Gong*’s money, how can we work to develop our *Tang*! As the old idiom goes, ‘only sitting and eating must one day use up the material even it is as huge as a mountain’.

“Actually, they are mindless too. Yes, it sounds huge, a hundred and so million dollars. But, how many villages and people do we have? So, how much money could they really obtain if we share the money? Maybe, it is enough for them to have some short journeys or other enjoyments. But, a real and long advantage? No!”

Notwithstanding this, a lot of his fellow kinsmen still came back with their counterarguments. In a casual meeting, one of them forcefully made his point as follows:

“What the hell makes us have so many fucking conflicts? It is all because there is a sum. Right! If we share it up, there will be no need to have so many arguments and everyone will be happy. That is why I suggested sharing it up. Keeping it for what? Bring fucking trouble on one’s own!”

In general, Deng Yin-fu is deeply concerned about the continuity of the communal business in his clan. He finds it imperative to work against the current trend of the rapid decline of the inalienability and indivisible principle of the

communal estate and goods in his clan. He went on to explain further:

“In fact, it has already been wrong for us to sell our ancestral land, much less sharing up of them. Because, it must reduce our property to keep our clan. Yes, I find it inevitable too. Just like the farmland, if we just keep them, we at most can earn about several hundred rents per year. But, if we sell them, the money we can make may be several millions and even more. It is totally incomparable. And, if it is a sale to the government, we even cannot say: no! For, they have the *Land Resumption Law* forcing us to do so, no matter if we want it or not. As such, it surely is rather necessary to develop new property or, at the very least, keep a sum for our clan if we want to keep our clan and make our clan good. Otherwise, how can our clan become a clan?”

IV. Male-only leadership in local politics

The coming into existence of a supra-village communal network in Fu Mei Au is a consequence of the British policy of indirect rule. For example, it seems that the British had never officially recognised each of the eleven little villages in Fu Mei Au as independent administrative units. On the contrary, the British simply drew them in together as one administrative village throughout their rule. In local terms, the British actually took their *Sheung* (higher-ordered village) as their base of administration rather than the immediate villages. Therefore it was the supra-village unit that was the fundamental level of British colonial administration.

Consequently, since the British introduced the post-war village representative system into their rural administration, the district office required the Dengs in Fu Mei

Au to select three village leaders¹⁰ among themselves to act on their behalf for four-year terms. In practice, the British also directly adopted the prevailing male-only rule in the regular open election of village leaders. Accordingly, I was told in the field, the procedures of male-only public elections of village leaders grew increasingly formal. Initially, the Dengs in Fu Mei Au simply undertook the election of village leaders on their own among their kinsmen and openly cast their votes by raising their hands in the ancestral hall before reporting the end results to the district office. But, subsequently, the District Office came to organise and supervise the proceedings of the whole event. They produced application forms for the participants complete with a specific application period and they also provided people with formal ballots and collection boxes for anonymous votes on the voting day. On top of that, the District Office sent a team of working staff with a chairperson to manage the voting process and eventually they proceeded to read out the end results in the ancestral hall. It was as late as 1994 when the British gave the same participatory right to village women in the public election of village leaders.

In other words, the British utilised an androcentric political system to further their rural administration by authorising the locally dominant agnatic group, with the

¹⁰ In the official term, they should be called as “village representatives”. But, the more usual local practice is to call them “village leaders”. I prefer using this much more common local term and continue to use it in the present research.

exception of the last three years before the end of the colonial rule of Hong Kong in 1997. According to knowledgeable local informants, the village leaders in Fu Mei Au had for a long time been empowered with influential official positions and various decisive executive powers in the local political field. Externally, they held official advisory status in the local administration, including land affairs such as the occasional implementation of public construction projects and providing official compensation to people, in particular for the resumption of their property. Internally, they acted as the chairmen in the supra-village communal meetings of their clan, in the arena of public discussions and decision-making. Moreover, their public tasks included checking up on the communal account of *Liang Guang Tang* kept by the *Si Lis* (managers), organising occasional collective ceremonies and functions, dealing with the complaints of people and helping them with formal applications to the government for the construction of small houses and the succession of family property.

Within this important communal political domain, the Dengs in An He village as one of the integral participants have not only kept up with their intensive participation, but have also been remarkably influential. In the first place, it is Deng Tuo-cheng who as noted before came from the village to act as one of the three village leaders in Fu Mei Au. Throughout the day-to-day political practice, Deng Tuo-cheng's private

property company has become an informal but essential social and political meeting centre for his different fellows from the different villages in Fu Mei Au. In his daily rounds, he regularly stays in touch with his Company in order to meet up with the villagers and to deal with their requirements. He regularly uses his Company as a free meeting place for them to undertake their social transactions and daily pastimes such as chatting, joking and playing mah-jong or cards. It is important to note that the other two village leaders and activists in their clan have also adopted his Company as a meeting place in order to discuss their daily affairs with him. Accordingly, he has not only made himself popular among his village fellows, but he is also able to make use of important new information and any new circumstances regarding his clan.

As a matter of fact, Deng Tuo-cheng is also the most senior village leader among the existing three, with his continuous re-appointments of the last three terms of office over the past twelve-year period. Throughout the past three rounds of open elections of the village leaders in Fu Mei Au, he has continued in his official capacity with little resistance as there were no fellow kinsmen who competed with him. The details of how he made this possible is out of the scope of this research but one of his close peers provided a general explanation as follows:

“Politics must have some dirty unsaid business. If the number of candidates to the election is not more than the three quotas, the government simply appoints them to be our village leaders. No real

election is needed. All in all, we have our methods to make 'compromises' [i.e., to keep the number of their candidates no more than the quotas] among our brothers."

However, the 'compromise' that this informant mentioned was not always achievable in political practice. In the early winter of 1998, during my fieldwork, the government officially arranged for a new round of public elections of village leaders for the new term of office from 1999 to 2003 in Fu Mei Au. On this occasion, Deng Tuo-cheng had to confront five open competitors from his fellow kinsmen in the clan.¹¹ Critically, this round in the public election had allowed both men and women to have the same participatory right. The official electoral population list, openly proclaimed in Fu Mei Au, showed that the registered voters included 309 men and 256 women. This was the first time that Deng Tuo-cheng had to engage in a real public election and the first time that he had to confront a new pool of female political participants from his clan.

In the end, seniority gave Deng Tuo-cheng a decisive advantage in the competition for his position as village leader in the clan. Many people in Fu Mei Au had already privately shown their support for him prior to the voting day, due to their

¹¹ Among the five new participants into the open competition for the three positions of village leaders, one of them was another existing village leader who, like Deng Tuo-cheng, sought to continue his term of office, whilst the rest were all fresh participants without any previous experience. As far as the remaining one among the existing three village leaders was concerned, did not wish to continue his term of office.

long familiarity with him. Some of them had requested his help in the past. They had made private gambling bets and the odds on him losing were the lowest or, conversely, his chances for winning were the highest. Eventually, it turned out as expected in that Deng Tuo-cheng won the election and obtained the highest number of votes from his village fellows.

As successful as he was, Deng Tuo-cheng and his close assistants had many complaints about the new official policy on female voters. In particular, they found it very difficult to persuade the young female group to their side. One of his assistants angrily blamed the new policy and the young female voter population as follows:

“This year [this election] is particularly troublesome! The new fucking policy makes our business unnecessarily complicated! The women also have right to voting. And, the young ones are the most troublesome ones. They have their own thoughts but they will not show you what they think. Our strategy against old women cannot work on them. Because, they are different from old women whom we can simply use some words to persuade them. Even if it is not enough, we still simply need to give them some little benefits that will work.”

In practice, Deng Tuo-cheng also needed to mobilise his wife to obtain the support of female voters. On an arranged occasion before the final voting day, his wife even utilised a festival day to present chickens as gifts for the female villagers and claimed this day as marking a special household celebration meal.

The dominant political practice in Fu Mei Au is still androcentric, despite female participation in the regular public elections of village leaders. In particular, attendance at the communal meetings for collective decisions on the highest decisions conducted in the ancestral hall still remains an exclusive prerogative of kinsmen. No women were allowed to attend these meetings. In spite of an exceptional case in the past, which I heard from an old man in the field, I was told that their agnatically androcentric rule could even be enforced through violent means:

“Once, a woman actually went to the meeting in our ancestral hall. She was our previous clan leader’s wife. But the people gave her no face. As she started to say few words, *Guo-ci* (a Deng kinsman) immediately held up a chair and interrupted her words. He said that: ‘here is our ancestral hall! How come women can talk here! If you dare to say fucking more, let’s see whether I will turn you out or not!’” Seeing that, her husband and sons had no words to say. After all, this is a male place. It is improper for women to go and talk there. All they could do at that moment was to immediately ask her to go.”

Remarkably, similar occurrences could take place among the kinsmen when it came to arguing with one another concerning their public affairs. The prevailing practices in the communal meetings indicated that internal collective discussions frequently descended into violent disputes and even on some occasions, aggressive fights with their opponents. In other words, there were few smooth and peaceful discussions before the time for open voting by raising their hand. As a result, many men were

averse to attending such unpleasant and conflictual events. For instance, one man commented:

“I of course have the right to go there [the communal meeting]. But the people [the constant attendees] there absolutely are barbarians. They seldom talk in a sensible way. Only loudly argue with one another and claim to fight one another all the times as what the typical gangsters do. I fail to understand why they could have so much talk and energy to make so many arguments even to the unnecessary trivia. I have my job to do. I don’t have time to bother about how they argue over our *Tai Gong*’s business and make the decisions. Just let them to go for it in their way and do whatever they like! The only important thing is that I can have my share.”

Discussion: mutual constitution between British colonial rule and Chinese patriarchal power

In summary, the ethnographic discussion presented in this chapter illuminates the strength of Chinese lineage practices in the New Territories. Its predominance in the locality can be dated long before the British colonial rule. Apparently, Chinese lineage practices, as some early studies had commonly maintained, did operate as a unifying force that bonded the descent segments into one cohesive structural whole, symbolically through a common genealogical framework and also materially through the control held by continuous agnatic corporations over multiple ancestral estates and goods.¹² However, this ethnographic discussion also suggests that being a unifying

¹² For example, Freedman (1958 & 1966), Baker (1966 & 1968), Potter (1970) and J. Watson (1975). Please refer to Chapter 2 for details.

force only is one aspect of Chinese lineage practice. Even though it is not entirely wrong, to see Chinese lineage practices this way is overly simplistic and partial. In fact, the lineage practices this discussion concentrates upon represents more the case made by Pasternak (1972),¹³ and that is one remarkably full of internal contradictory forces. Whilst some people act to keep a lineage for communal aggregation and collective advantage, others are interested in lineage practices for segmentary division and personal benefits.

Importantly, there are indications from the present case that Chinese lineage practices in the New Territories did not enjoy that degree of substantial growth and central importance in its own locality until their ancestral estate grew increasingly marketable in the recent development of the New Territories under British colonial rule. Chinese lineage practices also gained an increasingly formal political position and power under British colonial rule through the establishment of the post-war rural representative system. Accordingly, it could be said that Chinese lineage practices in the New Territories are amplified by new economic and political powers associated with British colonial rule. The British claimed to be keeping the status quo in their official discourse but that claim was frequently contradicted by their transformations of the status quo in actual practice. The social history of New Territories during the

¹³ For details please refer to Chapter 2.

British colonial era is not straightforward. As Chun put it: “The more things remain the same, the more they change”! (2000, p.1)

In the colonial context, the example of the Dengs also demonstrates Jones’ critique (1996) of the colonial encounter in the New Territories as a case of mutual reinforcement of British colonialism and Chinese patriarchy.¹⁴ Incidentally, the evidence from An He indicates that the consequential economic and political amplification of the Chinese lineage practice in the New Territories during the recent British colonial era was a resurrection of an old extremely patrilineal and patriarchal discourse in the village community that operated at different levels. Its main features in practice normalise not only a patrilineal succession and distribution of communal estate and wealth, but also an androcentric leadership and the organization of the public realm on an entirely male basis. Together with colonially recognized privileges, Chinese patriarchs could openly and even violently exclude women from participating in various essential economic and political activities.

The contradiction between the official claim and the actual practices of the colonial government of New Territories in effect benefited the Chinese patriarchs who have amassed landed wealth and power. In An He village, British colonial rule, with its legal and administrative means, ultimately reinforced the landed privileges Chinese

patriarchs derive from their agnatic corporation over their ancestral estate at different levels. Chinese patriarchs obtained increasingly substantial economic advantages from their agnatic corporation as a result of the rapidly rising market value of their land made possible by the general development of the New Territories. By building on Chun's argument, I thus would like to suggest a supplementary aspect of the colonial encounter in the New Territories: "The more contradictions in their ruling policy the British colonial government created, the more symbiosis with the Chinese patriarchs they maintained"!

Nevertheless, it is still necessary not to overestimate the colonial-cum-patriarchal order in the New Territories as Jones (1996) once did by viewing it as entirely monolithic and without any variations.¹⁵ In fact, the case of the Dengs in An He village has indicated as well how this colonial-cum-patriarchal order inherent in the Chinese lineage practices in the New Territories frequently failed to maintain local harmony but created instead competition for landed interests and official titles amongst the patriarchs resulting in internal ruptures and conflicts. In the next chapter, I move on to show the vulnerabilities inherent in this colonial-cum-patriarchal order by examining how people engage with this order in their household and community

¹⁴ For details please refer to Chapter 2.

¹⁵ For details please refer to Chapter 2.

life at the ground level.

Chapter 6: Patriarchy and gender relationships in local practice

Introduction

In this chapter, I advance the view that gender relationships in the New Territories are contested by men and women. I look at the household circumstance under Chinese lineage institution and practice. The word ‘household’ as used in this discussion refers to the living unit where people develop their home and have their domestic life.¹ At the empirical level, I start by looking at the close cooperation of the two sexes in their organisation of household works and responsibilities. I then proceed to highlight the common features of village men and women, not only within their gender-specific conducts in the household, but also their different daily activities. At the conceptual level, I show that Chinese patriarchy in practice is fundamentally indeterminate and vulnerable, even through it is authorised by top-down official recognition. Moreover, households in the New Territories have their own informal alternative practices, despite local claims to the centrality of patriarchy.

In general, I contribute to a gender-specific discussion of the circumstances in the New Territories under British colonial rule by providing new ethnographic evidence

¹ In Chinese, there are several terms that can be rendered as ‘household’. In everyday speech, in An He people usually refer to their household as *fang* or *jia*. In existing literatures, it is commonly rendered as *hu*, *hu kou* or *zhu ku*. (Jubb, 1994 and Lui & Wong, 1995).

from my study of the Dengs of An He.

I. Common livelihood of the two sexes

A common livelihood strategy of the Dengs' people in An He village is to have household earners in multiple occupations to meet their household needs.² However, the choice of occupations is not gender-neutral. There is an intensive cooperation of the two sexes throughout the different stages of their domestic life that has certain consequence for gender roles.

Both the male and female adults' working life histories in this village indicated that for most of them, the senior cohorts in particular, they had had to work extremely hard throughout their lives. From childhood, they had to take on work in order to contribute to the support of their households. There were exceptions in that some of them had obtained education but they were seldom full-time students. The opportunity for women to have an education was virtually non-existent. Many women thus remained illiterate for the rest of their lives. "We did not have a childhood. We only had work!" was a deeply felt regret of an aged and retired village woman. This emotionally charged statement expressed the common sentiments of the older people in the community.

According to the findings from my interviews, most village men and women held a stereotyped image of the ideal household. In that image, the husband was the full time breadwinner, the wife was a full-time mother, and the children were full-time students. However, their practice suggested that, to the contrary, both husband and wife were usually earners in their households and worked together to make a living. Their adult children (both sons and daughters) normally contributed to the household economies as well. In some cases, the adult children provided for their retired/aged parents' support and individually or collectively took up their retired/aged parent's position as a breadwinner in the household. It has only been recently -- since about the 1960s or 1970s -- that the male-centred nuclear household model has been realised in some villagers' households.

Nevertheless, the composition of the household, as many existing researches have already shown, changes in time and it has also varied structurally.³ The situation in An He village is no exception. In my observations of the practicalities of running a household, I saw a great variety of practices and found a rather different picture in the village from their conceptual ideal. Specifically, the number of nuclear households was merely 7 cases out of the total 23 households. Most households, in practice, were

² Please refer to chapter 4 for details.

³ For example, Cohen (1970 & 1976), Baker (1979) and, more recently, Shae & Ho (2001).

organised under other household models. They included eight single-member households (bachelors, spinsters or widows living alone), a one couple household (husband and wife living together), a single-parent household (a mother living with children), four stem-households (married or fully matured children living with their old parents) and two extended households (three generations living together).⁴ Moreover, women's participation in the organisation of their household livelihoods (as wife, mother or daughter) is seen as normal. Their household roles were also commonly recognised as important in the community. In many cases, their economic relationships with men hold essential emotional and personal significance in the practice of gender relationships.

A remarkable example in point is Ma Yue-rong's conjugal life with Uncle Xiang. She told me that she married him through a union arranged by her relatives when she was about 20 years old.⁵ From the time she got married, in An He village, she has worked as a peasant farmer and has toiled with her husband to undertake all agricultural tasks on the rented farm. Even up to now, I observed that their close economic cooperation has formed the basis of most of their common activities and intensive interactions through their daily routine.

⁴ The figure does not include the Dengs' households in urban area/foreign countries and the non-Dengs' households in An He village.

⁵ I was told in An He that arranged unions were a normal marital practice in the past, and some old

Ma Yue-rong told me that her life was one of unending hard work. Even during her confinement she was unable to take time out, which she felt to be the deepest loss of her life. But she loved to demonstrate through her stories how her husband had worked shoulder-to-shoulder with her for the interests of the household. Reflecting on her marriage, she felt deeply pleased and said she was really lucky to have a husband who had always worked hard:

“I married my husband through the introduction of a relative. But, I never saw him. No dating, not like the present people at all! I only learned about him from my relatives. They said that he was a peasant in a village and he was good. So, I trusted my relatives. But, I have been lucky as what they said was true. He is good. He is willing to work and take care of family.”

Even so, there are indications that the close economic cooperation of this peasant couple was still barely enough to meet their household needs. An added burden to their relationship was that both Ma Yue-rong and Uncle Xiang had hoped to have a son. To achieve this shared expectation, they had five daughters before they eventually managed to achieve two sons. In this regard, Ma Yue-rong recalled the background as follows:

“Since we [Ma Yue-rong and Uncle Xiang] lived together, we wanted to have a son. You know, we are rural peasants. Our minds normally are more traditional. When we pass away, we also need a son to hold the funeral ritual for us according to the rule. If not, it will be, you know, very shameful. The people may come to laugh on you too. When “our *Tai*

people like Ma Yue-rong in the village experienced such marriages.

Gong give us pork” [i.e., when their lineage organization shares ancestral goods], the people also only give them to households who have sons.”

“But, Uncle Xiang and I at first failed to have any sons. Before I finally gave birth to *Wei Ming* [their first son], we had already given birth to four daughters. Actually, I had had no will to have more children then. But, Uncle Xiang felt it would not be safe to have only one son. If there was something going wrong with him, he was afraid that the household would have no heir. So, he hoped to have one more son. But, I once again unexpectedly had a daughter before I had one more son.

Subsequently, Ma Yue-rong continued, she and her husband lived under constant financial pressure because of the immediate need to sustain such a large number of dependants. Furthermore, their household lives grew increasingly harder as their household income from their agricultural occupation continuously declined. They eventually had to engage in various other income-generating activities in addition to their agricultural work. The additional work they undertook during that domestically hard time were manual tasks obtained from the nearby factories such as assembling flowers, linking and rolling raw rattan, cutting the over-long threads of garments, turning over the seams of gloves and collecting recyclable garbage like electric wire, soft drink cans, newspapers, cartons and glass bottles.

Both Ma Yue-rong and Uncle Xiang said that there was no substantial improvement in their economic conditions until the first of their elder daughters started to work and make regular contributions to the income of the household. They

also used their earnings to allow their younger sisters and brothers to go to school rather than work. In 1985, they drew out all their savings to re-build their ancestral home, the state of which Uncle Xiang had felt to be a personal and household shame. When the renovations on their home were completed, the household possessed a new and fashionable two-storeyed house with several rooms and balconies. Both Ma Yue-rong and Uncle Xiang continue to live happily in it with their adult children up to the time of my fieldwork.

When Uncle Xiang talks about his household, he occasionally expresses his gratitude to his wife and elder daughters. In particular, he appreciates his wife for her willingness to share the past domestic hardships with him. He admires his daughters as among his favourite children who possess a great sense of filial piety. In a casual conversation, he once again discussed the renewal project of his ancestral house. Lastly, he came to the point and expressed his high regard for his elder daughters who surpassed his expectations:

“That I can now live so comfortably is all thanks to my daughters! They truly helped me a lot.”

Despite the largely undifferentiated gender division of labour in the economic activities in the fields, other more marked domestic gender differences exist in the village. Women are responsible for food preparation and daily chores and men enjoy

the right to ask for domestic services from women. This is still the normal practice in the village. In some cases, the village women need to provide further domestic services for the higher status women in their home such as their mother or mother-in-law. Since most women are responsible for the running of the household, the comments of Bo Zhong Liang, another senior woman in the village, gives a comprehensive picture of how a village woman lives under this “double burden” throughout the different stages of her life:

“When I was a child, I started to learn how to do household work. Of course, it could be said that I was the lucky one because my household was not so poor. What I needed to do then was not so much indeed. But, it was really stupid to get married in our age. We would not have dating like the present people. We also never thought about running away [i.e., divorce] but simply put up with all the hardship.”

“Every morning, I had to go to work on the farm. At about noon, I had to collect firewood and then cart it back home. If one’s husband were good, he would help her to do the household work. But, day-to-day, I needed to prepare some warm water for my husband and wash his feet once he came back home. I also needed to cook the two meals per day for my husband and mother-in-law. If I failed to do this on time, my mother-in-law would scold me and tell me I am useless. Some mother in laws in other households would even beat their daughters-in-law or ask their sons to punish their wives if they failed to perform the household work well. During the summer nights, I needed to fan my babies to make them sleep more easily, before I could go to sleep.”

“Later, I changed my job and worked in a construction site. I still needed to do all the household work and serve my husband and mother-in-law. But, luckily, I only needed to tolerate my mother-in-law for six years. She passed away six years after I got married to my husband. I never treated

my daughters-in-law the way my mother-in-law treated me. Since I became their mother-in-law, I would also help them to look after their children.”

“Now I can say that I am enjoying the easiest time. I don’t need to worry about the matter of making money any more. I can simply let the younger generation make their living on their own. You know, all my children have grown up. They have their own households. Some of my children’s children have their own households too. What I now have to do only is to help my deceased husband to keep the ancestral property for the children. I have been in retirement for a long time.”

Both Ma Yue-rong’s case and Bo Zhong Liang’s discussion cast fresh light on existing studies of Chinese household. A household is not a static, unitary and monolithic entity. A household consists of specific domestic histories, living stories, personal narratives, ongoing interactions and shifting relationships with different domestic members and extra-domestic kin at different times.⁶ Gender hierarchy and relationships in a household are part of dynamic human structure and are subject to local circumstances and the intricate interplay among people pursuing their own projects.⁷ For example, not all men are capable of upholding patriarchal authority in his household. They are seldom as strong and powerful as the dominant patriarchal discourse maintains. On the contrary, men frequently fail to achieve the fundamental

⁶ Existing literatures that provided us with good demonstrations of this idea are many. But Cohen’s monographs (1970 & 1976) remain the highly readable and useful ones. For a highlight of his key argument please refer to Chapter 2.

⁷ On this subject matter, M. Wolf (1972) has a strikingly substantial and insightful discussion with her intricate ethnographic account from rural Taiwan. For more on her key argument please refer to Chapter 2.

domestic requirements and social expectation of the dominant patriarchal discourse.

II. Male incompetence

If the patriarchal order is to continue in practice then the household head must be succeeded by his male heir. However, this fundamental structural demand poses a vexing issue of succession for the household. The genealogical history of the Dengs' in An He village showed over several generations cases where men remained bachelors, were infertile in their marriage or, sadly, lost their sons through infant mortality or other unexpected fatal accidents.

Figure 6.1 is a table that depicts the occurrence of these events in the Mu De Tang (the largest Dengs' lineage) in An He village at the different generation levels. This table indicates that Mu De Tang has continuously suffered from a large proportion of sonless men for many generations. A turning point occurred in the twenty-second generation, which marked the peak of the Mu De Tang and the beginning of their continuous decline to the present time.

The remarkable issue here is that it does not simply concern demographics. Figure 6.2 is a full kinship diagram of the Mu De Tang that clearly shows what happened in their official patrilineal order when their kinsmen failed to have sons at the different generation levels. This kinship diagram reveals that the people in the Mu

Figure 6.1: The genealogy of Mu De Tang: a cross-tabulation table

Level of generations (From 1740)	Number of sonless kinsmen (by)				Gross total of kinsmen	Proportion of sonless kinsman (%)
	No. of marriages	Infertility	Pre-mature death	Total		
XVII	0	0	0	0	1	0
XVIII	0	0	0	0	1	0
IX	0	0	0	0	4	0
XX	0	1	0	1	11	9
XXI	0	0	1	1	14	7
XXII	2	3	5	10	27	37
XXIII	2	2	3	7	19	36
XXIV*	2	2	4	8	24	33
XXV**	--	--	--	--	27	--

Source: information on the written genealogy from the Dengs and from my census data for the generations up to 2000

Notes:

* : The present senior generation

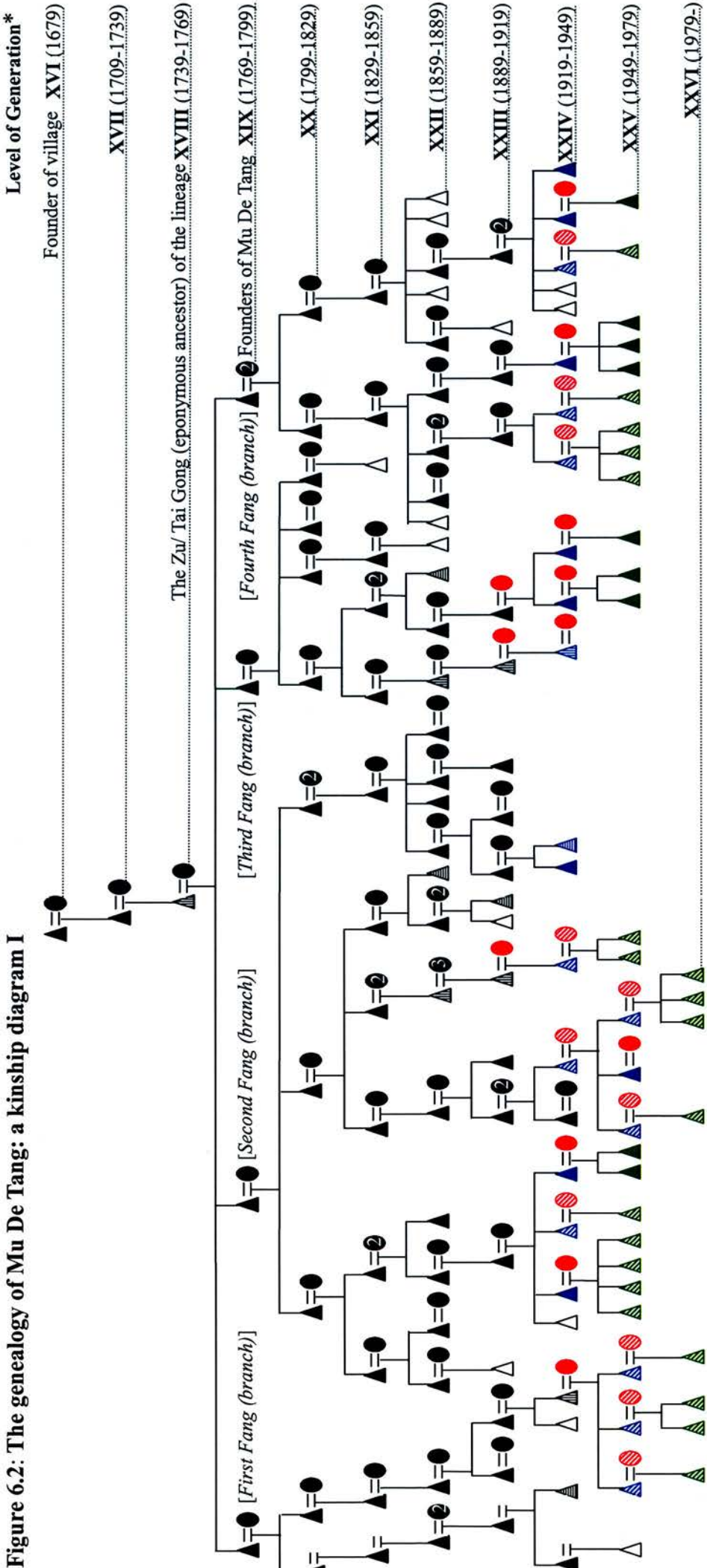
** : The present junior generation including 26 adolescents up to 2000

-- : Not appropriate

De Tang did not maintain a consistent patrilineal line and expansion. The official patrilineal order contained numerous lineal discontinuities, irrecoverable truncations and even entire terminations of specific branches and sub-branches. Thus the fictive kinship practice of adoption that kept their agnatic branches extendable started from the second ancestor and occurred continuously throughout their later development as a consequence of their frequent failures to produce a patrilineal heir.

On the other hand, their ancestors also time and again had their sons adopted by the lineage practice of *Guo Ji* between two brothers or common brothers in the clan. I was told that this practice occurs when one brother possesses more than one

Figure 6.2: The genealogy of Mu De Tang: a kinship diagram I



KEY: Deceased male Living male Deceased wives Living males Single adolescent Migrated abroad

Adopted in Adopted out Living wives Migrated abroad Migrated abroad

Adopted out Migrated abroad Migrated abroad Migrated abroad

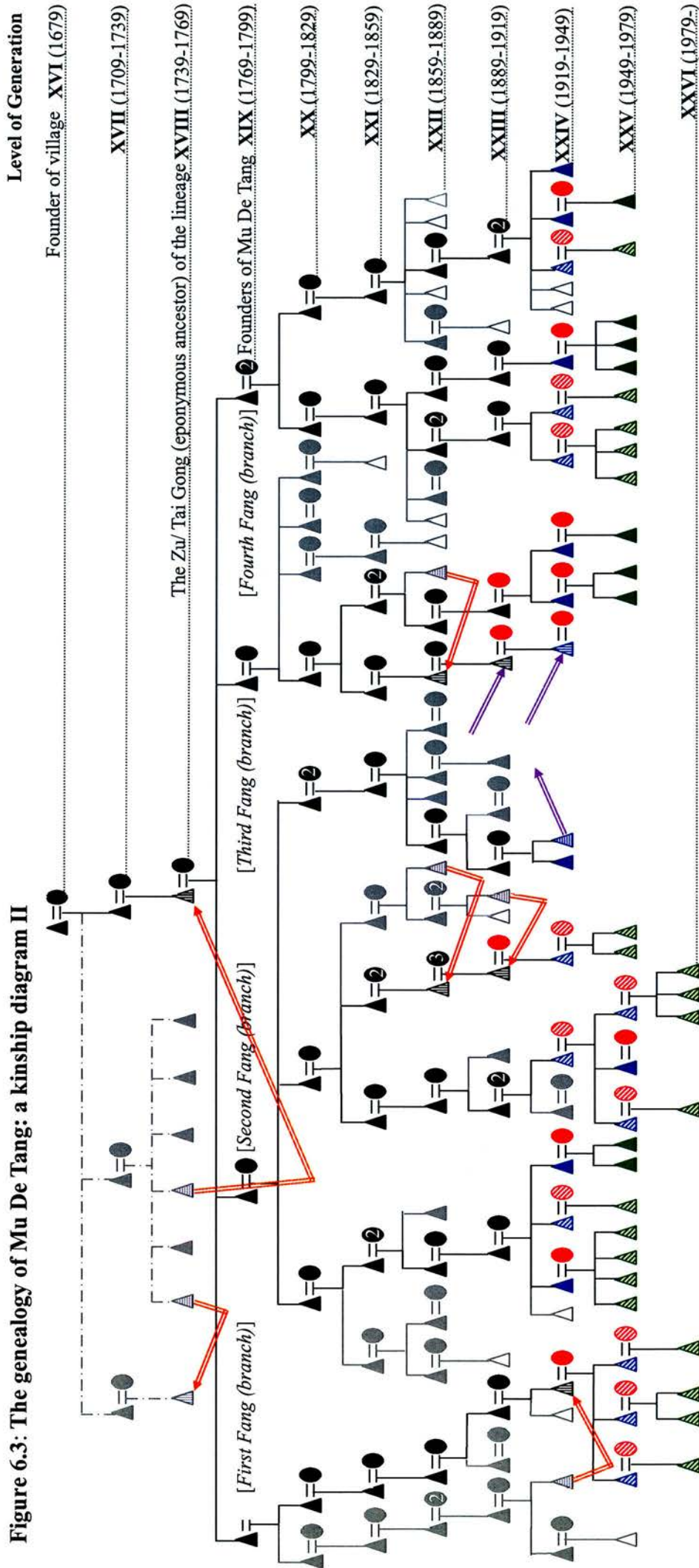
Premature mortality Migrated abroad Migrated abroad Migrated abroad

Number of wives > 1

195

* The Dengs' written genealogy traces the founder of An He village as having lived between 1679 and 1742. The beginning of this Dengs' lineage can be dated as starting from the birth date of their founder. The number of years contained in the following generation are estimated figures. This estimation is made on the hypothesis that it took about 30 years for the rise of a new generation.

Figure 6.3: The genealogy of Mu De Tang: a kinship diagram II



son while another brother suffers from the lack of a son. The brother with sons is willing to give one of his sons to his brother without one; thereby his sonless brother now has a son to succeed him.⁸ From the perspective of the son transferred, his father gives him to his uncle as his uncle's son, and his real father becomes his fictive uncle while his real uncle becomes his fictive father. In other words, it is a practice of internal adoption between agnatic branches within a clan.⁹ Figure 6.3 is an extended kinship diagram from Figure 6.2 that gives a comprehensive picture of how their ancestor in Mu De Tang adopted their fictive son and had their natural sons adopted. This extended kinship diagram also indicates where the practice of *Guo Ji* occurred in the Mu De Tang.

The most important point about the Mu De Tang's genealogy is that the continuous structural need for a male heir is actually beyond human capacity to sustain. Using biological analogies, we can say that the ever-dispersing genealogical tree has to be kept going by transplantations from other seeds and growths. A patrilineal order is

⁸ It has to be noted that *Guo Ji* is not a necessary practice according to rules required by Chinese lineage organization. A man as a brother with sons holds no institutional responsibility to give his sonless brother one of his sons. The rise of this practice is totally dependent upon the private inter-household deal of the people. But, it is out of the scope of my direct observation to see how people made their inter-household deals to transfer a son from one household to another household.

⁹ In a conceptual sense, it is worth pointing out an essential difference of *Guo Ji* from other fictive kinship practices. Namely, *Guo Ji* is not simply an adoption of children to make up the household incompleteness. Beyond that, it is a peculiar fictive kinship practice to obtain a paternal successor and to maintain the consanguinity at the same time. It is also a peculiar self-help practice of the lineage organization to keep their agnatic branches going as some of their agnatic branches have failed to propagate a natural born son. This is why the adopted child must be a boy who comes from the same clan. But, on actual occasions, some of the sonless branches merely manage to obtain a son from a simple adoption instead of *Guo Ji* when they have worked to make their branches extendable (please

in fact an artificial arrangement. It is not a natural order derived from a biogenetic reality. Rather, it is a social order, which requires men to use their kinship relationships to support the continuity of patriarchal rule. In this social order, men need to borrow others' male kin to meet the continuous *social* structural need if ones' biogenetic capacity fails to give this pseudo-natural order a son. The insistence on a strict patrilineal order and therefore on patrilineal succession ironically creates a constant critical threat to the patriarchal order itself. It is a double-edged situation and creates huge burdens.

During the year 2000, I encountered a sad event in the field when Deng De-ming, a male elder in the An He village died. According to the Dengs' genealogy and their interpretations, he was of the twenty third generation and belonged to the first sub-branch of the third *Fang* (main branch) of the *Four Families* under the Mu De Tang (please refer to Figure 6.3). His grandfather, however, was infertile and adopted a son from his younger brother by *Guo Ji*. His father (i.e., this adopted-in-son by *Guo Ji*) also was infertile and once again needed to find a fictive son in order to continue the lineage. On this occasion, some villagers recalled that he met little Deng De-ming by chance and adopted him when Deng De-ming was in his teens. Deng De-ming was an orphan; both of his parents had died during World War II, and he had wandered into

refer to Figure 6.3 for details).

their village one day seeking opportunities to make a living. Before his adoptive father adopted him and gave him his present name, he worked as a child labourer in his adoptive father's farm.

Unexpectedly, Deng De-ming also suffered from infertility and his sole son was not born to his wife but instead came by adoption. It was known to the villagers that Deng De-ming had bought his adopted son from a prostitute. But later everyone felt sad about Deng De-ming's misfortune as his adopted son became a drug addict when he was around 16 years old, becoming a criminal who was in prison more often than he was at home.

Up to now in the community, it remains uncertain about how these events were seen to have affected Deng De-ming. The villagers merely observed that there was a dramatic personal change in his life. He abruptly absented himself during the regular communal assemblies, the occasional festivals and celebrations of the clan. In his daily rounds, he isolated himself and hardly talked to any one. The old villager Deng Han-jie had been close to him since childhood. With many complex emotions, he recalled:

"He [Deng De-ming] was active and playful when we were young. I clearly remember how much fun we had and how exciting it was when we stole sweet potatoes from somebody's field and cooked them together in our habitual corner. Also, one Lunar New Year, he and I really had a silly matter of "bullshit", as we naughtily put the burning firecracker onto the

bull's shit and didn't have enough time to run away.”

“But, I didn't expect that his character would change so quickly once he was married. After we had discussed this many times, we could not help making a guess that this was a case of his self-humiliation because of his failure to father a child! The point is that we all got married more or less at the same time. For a time, I was the most shameful one who was only able to have daughter after daughter. But, he never did achieve anything – even a daughter. It could be that in this way he could not help feeling humiliated and developing his later odd behaviours.”

In general, the dominant patriarchal discourse over-determines the male capacity and strength. It vests men with singular superiority and power but meanwhile creates a sense of deep anxiety and incompetency. It is a hegemonic system of male privilege but it is also a fundamental fiction of male might. The present ethnographic case suggests that the rule in the prevailing patriarchal discourse largely is the exception in the living reality. In practice the behaviour of men frequently goes against the expected “proper behaviour” according to the commonly held understanding of the rules and codes of behaviour.

Clearly, my interviews with An He villagers suggest that the senior men and women in particular maintain a shared expectation that a man should be independent. At the very least, he should not rely upon his natal household but instead should work to earn his living as an adult. He should also organise and secure the livelihood of his own household. At best, he might develop a prosperous career or create some

businesses and acquire properties of his own. He should do his best for his household; set an excellent example for his children as a person with a good code of conduct and/or bring cultural honour or titles to his household.

At first sight, men seem to meet the last mentioned common social expectation to some extent. Most of them have their own work and have organised their households. Some of them even have established land businesses and have become property developers. Collectively, their genealogy also indicates that they have had some kinsmen who have earned a respectable status as scholars successful in the state examination, some of whom became powerful bureaucrats in the government in the past. However, ethnographic information also shows that men have frequently been engaged in self-defeating practices behind their public persona, indulging in such vices as heavy gambling.

The men in the community, as mentioned in Chapter 3, have opened a simple clubhouse for themselves. Day-to-day, they regularly drop in for talking, joking, drinking, smoking and, above all, playing cards and mahjong. On these gambling occasions, they play for large stakes late into the night and even overnight. In some extreme cases an individual may fail to turn up to work the next day because of their playing into the night. Besides these extravagant daily amusements, many men

habitually engage in other forms of gambling activities or expensive pastimes. During the racing season, they love to hang around and bet on horses. During the holidays, they individually or collectively visit the casino. Some of them even have intensive interests in some costly games such as bird fighting, cricket fighting and dog fighting.

As a consequence of their indulgences they seldom spend much time and energy on daily household routines. By default, they have little immediate or substantial influence in the domestic sphere where, theoretically, they should rule through their exclusive patriarchal authority. Above and beyond this level, their interest in gambling often threatens the household harmony and even leads to household collapse. Frequently women's disputes with men revolve around the men's negligence of daily domestic practices and occasional loss of considerable amounts of money on the gambling table. There are also cases in which men have sold ancestral land and property holdings to pay gambling debts and thereby have created a household crisis. A case in point is that of the deceased Deng Gan-lin. His son recalled how his father gambled away all their ancestral fortune during his lifetime and created their present domestic hardships:

“My father was terribly fond of gambling. When he was alive, he had already lost all our ancestral lands and houses, which our household should previously have had quite a lot. As far back as I could remember, he never needed to work during his lifetime. He also was a powerful man in the clan. But, due to his reckless gambling, he had even mortgaged the house where

we lived before his demise and left us a lot of his remaining debts.”

“At that time, our household was really fucking miserable! The people frequently popped in our home and asked my mother to pay my father’s debts to them. Some nasty bitches in the village also used this moment to humiliate my mother and laughed at us for our poverty. Once, my mother uncontrollably began to argue with them. They collectively beat up my mother. What could I do at that moment simply seeing how these fucking bitches beat my mother? For, I just was a little boy in my teens at that time. If my father were not so fond of gambling, our household surely would not remain so poor now! I would also have no need to work so hard to make my living!”

On the other hand, I could observe that many men in the village indulged not only in gambling but in other leisured pursuits and even in extreme laziness. It was a common practice for men to take time out from their work to have more leisure or entertainment time. In this regard, three men, Deng Ri-xin, Deng Qui-dao and Deng Bao-fu, are three extreme cases in the village. These three men have in common that they have had no real job, they have not been married and they do not have their own household. They simply continue to live in their household of birth and are provided for by their households and/or their given shares from their ancestral business kept by their households. The villagers often comment that these three kinsmen form “a lineage of scum” in their clan.

Nevertheless, the people in An He village have felt it to be shameful to be connected to these three men. With regards to the oldest of the three, Deng Bao-fu,

people generally regard him as the greatest disgrace to their clan. In practice, Deng Bao-fu has also frequently been denied his patriarchal privileges at both the domestic and communal levels because of his poor personal behaviour. Specifically, the villagers feel that Deng Bao-fu is a failure, as he has never kept down a proper occupation. They avoid contact with him and have collectively isolated him. Some of the villagers have expressed the opinion that he may be mentally deficient as he has some silly expressions and movements. But Deng Bao-fu has frequently bragged of his academic achievement up to the tertiary level. The villagers said that time and again he has invited them to see his personal photos which include one of him in a bachelor's gown and cap. In addition to this arrogant behaviour, at the occasional communal banquets, he often openly demands to be seated on the stage in their ancestral hall on account of his scholarly status. This behaviour is deeply embarrassing to them as they are not accustomed to such demands in a public place. The people also feel that he is arrogant in asking them to respect his ideas and follow his advice at the public assemblies. This behaviour is considered outrageous and he been beaten and punched several times at these occasions.

During the time of my research, there was an incident in which Deng Bao-fu was involved in some new shameful behaviour and farce in the eyes of the villagers. It

involved his mother who one afternoon, suddenly died from old age. Since his father also had passed away many years ago, the issue of the inheritance of ancestral property arose in his family. Deng Bao-fu as the eldest son in the household proceeded to transfer the title to the ancestral property under his own name in the official documents. He found to his consternation, that his mother had already secretly passed all the ancestral property to his younger brother during her lifetime. He therefore failed to get title to any ancestral property and obtained no share at all. Consequently, he could not help openly crying and asking other villagers and elders why his old mother had trusted his younger brother instead of him. He also felt shocked and publicly blamed his deceased mother:

“I have nothing now! I really have nothing now! I hate my mother in my bones!”

But, almost everyone in the village felt that the reason for his deceased mother’s actions was absolutely clear. A close female peer of his deceased mother said:

“A-fen [his deceased mother] surely passed the things [i.e., property] to his younger brother. He at least is a normal man having a wife, sons and daughters. He could keep the family line continuing. But, [Deng] Bao-fu had nothing appropriate. He said he is a university student. But, who knows if that is true! He of course is the eldest son in the household. But, so what! He is such a fool!”

This section has shown how male hedonism, self-indulgence, mediocrity and

stupidity has fundamentally undermined the high domestic expectations of them and the prevailing patriarchal discourse. In this light, a critical gender issue is immediately raised. If the village men are so frequently in default and even self-defeated on the ground level, what in the meantime happens to the village women and their actual role in the local household and community? The next section works to address this issue.

III. Matriarchal authority

According to patriarchal rule, Chinese women are subjected to their *patria potestas* vis-à-vis their fathers or husbands. In particular, they should dutifully serve them and totally abide by their orders.¹⁰ However, when women become mothers and mothers-in-law they are no longer so defenceless or powerless. Just as the specific individual cases discussed before have shown, they are able to exercise real power over their households. While they may feel oppressed as a wife and/or daughter-in-law, in their role as a mother, they are largely revered. In An He village, my fieldwork indicates a radically different practice in the constitution of the local community from the official patriarchal discourse. A lot of women in fact become the real household head as the official male masters die or withdraw. Many village people have actually

¹⁰ For a more detail discussion of Chinese patriarchy, particularly the complex process of how it historically became a prevailing jural and official order in the practice of Chinese life please refer to the classical work by T. Z. Qu (1967).

grown up and lived under the direct domestic authority of a mother instead of a father. One common contextual reason for this is that men usually predecease their wives. Even if their wives die before them, it is also quite normal for men to re-marry young women but it is not so normal the other way round. In this case, there tends to be a large age gap between the re-married husband and his new wife, therefore the possibility of a female-headed household also tends to be higher.

In a sense, this common marital practice in the past probably produced a crop of widows and even young widows who nurtured a considerable number of Dengs' households in the village under their care and education. Importantly, I was often told that their matriarchal authority in practice can extended to their children's and even grandchildren's households as well. For instance, they normally hold a central position in the occasional meetings and even decision-making power over the shared ancestral property and business amongst their children's and grandchildren's households. It is in reference to such a circumstance that I will use the term 'female-headed family' as a name for a group of households that is under the authority of a mother with a close tie.¹¹ As far as the observable current situation is concerned,

¹¹ It has been well documented that a Chinese household can develop into a group of households but retain some important economic linkages (e.g., a common budget) and power relationships (e.g., being subjected to the same senior member) with close residence in the same place. (Croll, 1987; Jubb, 1994 and M. Cohen, 1976) The discussion I provide here is by drawing on this existing view and putting it into a more gender-specific one.

Figure 6.4. Female-head families in the Dengs in An He village

	Headed by the 7 widows	Total number in clan
Household	19 (49%)	39 (100%)
People	62 (47%)	131 (100%)

Source: Census data from fieldwork up to 2000

there are seven female-headed families which totally possess 19 households and 62 members under them (see Figure 6.4).

On this subject, I will provide more analysis with specific individual cases in a later discussion. But, for now, it should be noted that there is one more immediate practical reason for the existence of women acting as the substantial head and even as power figures in the domestic arena. This has to do with the problem of general poverty of men as discussed previously.

Zheng A-xue is a married-in-woman in the village aged about 40 years. She married Deng Qui-ren 16 years ago. She now has two daughters and one son and lives with her old mother-in-law in an ancestral home. In the beginning, she had a notorious reputation for not keeping an orderly household and habitually going out and indulging in gambling. One of the senior village women recalled:

“She was an extremely bad wife. She seldom cooked for her children and frequently left all the work to her old mother-in-law. What she always did day-to-day was to play mah-jong or cards. I once had tried to persuade her to spend more time on the household and give more care to her children. But she swore against me and said: ‘Bitch! Shut up! That is none of your business!’”

A similar critical observation of her came from a senior village man:

“Her behaviour surely was no good at all. Whenever I saw her in the village, she concentrated upon gambling and loved all the games just as the men did. How could a woman behave like this! Her three children were very pitiable indeed!”

Furthermore, there are indications that her old mother-in-law complained the most about Zheng A-xue and at times exchanged words and blows with her regarding the domestic chores and looking after the children. She once said:

“My son is useless! His wife is a typical lazy-bones. Needless to say, she fails to know how to serve the mother-in-law as other good daughters-in-law do for their mothers-in-law. She almost forgets where is her household.”

Her husband Deng Qui-ren was deeply discontented with her behaviour as well. But, interestingly enough, he recognised that he could hardly blame his wife as he obviously shared the same (mis)conduct with her:

“Sometimes, my mother asked me to discipline my wife. To be frank, I also felt unpleasant: she is so lazy. But, how could I challenge my wife? I am so fucking fond of gambling too.”

However, the villagers said that Deng Qui-ren had once beaten his wife Zheng A-xue for her constant neglect of the children. Subsequently, Zheng A-xue gradually changed her behaviour, becoming more and more domesticated and concerned for her children. Currently, she has steadily earned some of her reputation back from the people in the community. During my interview with her, Zheng A-xue was surprisingly frank and openly talked about this personal change in her. She described some of the specific tensions with her husband and mother-in-law out that arose out of her disinclination to do household work. She also recalled some essential truths learned from others, which led her to acknowledge that she should give adequate care to her children. All in all, she emphasised that:

“I gave them birth; I have to keep them good! That is why I quit my bad habits.”

Most importantly, this individual case demonstrates the agents that work to confine women to the household. It indicates how both patriarchal and matriarchal powers in the household share the same interests to pressure women into domesticity. The disciplining instruments utilised by these two dominant household powers were not only the concurrent discursive forces, but also direct physical forces. The actor-participants included not only the intimate household members, but also the

fellow villagers in the community. The most powerful discourse was that of motherhood which induced in Zheng A-xue to reflect on her duties to her children, leading to a radical self-transformation of her behaviour.

More commonly, however, it is women's hard labour and close attention to their household that gives them some considerable standing. Through their long and direct involvement in the community, they have also developed a strong communal social network and a good understanding of the various useful practicalities of village life. A number of elder women have even established their substantial seniority and authority in the village.

An obvious case in point is the old widow Liang San-jie. She now lives alone in an ancestral house by the main entry and exit passage of the village. She also retired many years ago and her present daily routine is simple and leisurely. In the community, she is a well-known senior woman held in high regard. Among people she is widely appreciated as an impressive widow who, on her own, has raised her son and sustained her old mother-in-law through her illness until she died a peaceful death. One of her close female peers sympathetically said:

“Her life has been really miserable and could be said to be the worst of all of us. It is a life of tears indeed! But, if she was not in that household, I think her household would already have gone down.”

In the general community life, she is a well-informed elder with a sociable and talkative personality. She knows numerous domestic stories, personal histories, interesting trivia and momentous events both current and from the past. Her understanding of customary practices is particularly clear concerning ritual routines for the household and the various specific open ceremonies for the village-at-large. Whenever the fellow villagers are unclear on how to carry out particular rituals for their household, she is an authority on whom they have come to rely. Whenever there are special customary functions in the community, she is frequently the main figure taking charge of the events and informing people on the “dos” and “don’ts”. She has therefore directly influenced local activities and has generally become a good conversationalist and an essential informant concerning fellow females, the village leaders and other men as well.

Above all, the life history of Liang San-jie explains the frequent rise of female-head families in the community. The following is a close discussion of her personal and domestic career based on the direct materials from her own accounts. This discussion provides some empirical specificity of how men often withdraw from the domestic field while women become the pragmatic managers of all household business and even the shared lineage affairs in the village. Furthermore her accounts

also review an example of the patriarchal domestic practice of arranging a woman in matrimony to a man. This is the old marriage institution of the “child-bride” by which a household purchases a little girl and raises her to become their son’s wife in order to meet the household need of continuing the next generation succession line.¹² Her discussion reveals how a child-bride managed to rise out of her lifelong vulnerability and, by implication, how women, invisible and inaudible in general, are able to deal with these disadvantageous situations.

According to Liang San-jie, she came from a well-to-do household in Macau, a Portuguese enclave in the southern part of China close to Hong Kong. Her father was an owner of a profitable cake shop. She was an object of envy in her household because she was the most beloved child of her father among the four siblings. Then her father died accidentally from an injury. Her well-off childhood protected by her fathers’ fondness was abruptly cut short. The affluent life style of her whole household collapsed as a consequence of her father’s death. Worse still, her existence in her natal household was increasingly uncertain. Her mother held a deep aversion against her and mistreated her with frequent scolding and forceful beatings:

“Since my father died, I became very miserable. Looking back, I still

¹² In the past, it was not a rare practice for Chinese households to keep a child-bride for their sons. As far as An He village is concerned, local information shows that there were at least 5 child-brides in the last one to two generations. But, all of them now have run away except the case that I discuss in the present study.

wonder how I could get by from moment to moment. At that time, my mother believed that the cause of my father's death was me. Because, I had once crossed a "sword" [a toy] in a play with my father before he really died. Actually, it was a fake. I also failed to know that my father would die in the same year. How could my mother blame me! I also didn't want my father to die! But, she really hated me to the core and took me as the god damned devil in the household. Almost everyday, I was scolded and beaten by her. Sometimes, when she was angry, she even would suddenly throw whatever thing was at hand against me."

Finally, her mother decided to sell Liang San-jie as a child-bride for \$200 when she was only fourteen. Liang San-jie thus was passed to her present household in An He village. Her conjugal household then was extremely simple and poor. From the time that she started living in that household, she needed to follow the bidding of her mother-in-law who was an old widow, and to cultivate the farm and raise the livestock. Besides her old mother-in-law, she only had her husband-to-be who was the sole son in the household. He worked as a sailor, which constantly kept him away for long periods. He stayed at home for only short spells of time. He was also about ten years older than her and their arranged union did not take real effect until she had been settled in the village for about two years. Afterwards, she gradually became used to the village environment and eventually had a son with her husband from which she obtained a great delight in her life:

"When I just lived in the village, I was truly unused to the peasant living. Before that, what I used to eat was all nice food. I also had servants at

home. I seldom walked without shoes. If I didn't have shoes, I would always fail to walk. But, in the village, I needed to work with my mother-in-law and learned to farm in the field. When I took my first step onto the soil on my bare feet, I really wanted to die and felt my life was terrifically unbearable."

"But, it was not long before I familiarised myself with the crop cultivation and became a quick paddy planter in the field. Later on, I also had my son. When he was a baby, he was very lovely indeed. His appearance looked very like me. He was lovely, fatty and his skin was very white. When I embraced him in my arms, he always had numerous lovely expressions or moves, which were really great. My mother-in-law also felt very happy as she eventually became a grandma."

However, Liang San-jie pointed out that she was completely unaware that her husband in fact was an adulterous man. He had been keeping a woman secretly before his mother had arranged a wife for him. Liang San-jie's union with him lasted for merely five years as her husband eventually ran away with his secret woman. In effect, she entered widowhood for the rest of her life:

"Perhaps, this world is fixed! Everything is fixed! Sometimes, I really felt very sad about myself. As a daughter, my mother hated me. As a daughter-in-law, my husband betrayed me. I still remember that it was on an afternoon when my husband strangely asked me whether I would allow him to bring a concubine back. At that time, I simply felt that he was joking. So, I casually said: 'fine'."

"But, later, he really brought a woman back to live with us. What's more, he explained that he actually had been having this woman before he had me. He really loved her. He hoped to let his mother and me know about her for a long time but he was afraid that we would not like her, so on and so on. I only felt very sad at that time and failed to know what I should do.

To begin with, this woman seemed very nice. She would help me to do this or that and look after my son as well. But, by the end of the day, my husband secretly planned with her to run away. I began to live on my own.”

In addition, Liang San-jie mentioned that her mother-in-law felt shocked about her son’s betrayal too. Her mother-in-law also internalised a deep sense of guilt for her and at times expressed a considerate acceptance if Laing San-jie decided to leave the household. Accordingly, Liang San-jie had thought of leaving the household too. But, reflecting upon the innocence of her son and the needy situation of her old mother-in-law, she eventually decided to stay in the household:

“Yes, I should have run away, no reason for doing otherwise! My mother-in-law also felt it was hard for me to stay in this home. She even said that a fish, no matter how good, could not be sustained in a pond without water! She would accept my leaving. But, every time, I imagined how unbearable it will be to my mother-in-law if I run away. She is so aged and my son is so innocent, I would soften up and could not be as heartless as my husband. In fact, that I could stand through my past hardship was thanks to my mother-in-law. She really was a good person and treated me well.”

To keep the household and raise the little son left from the adulterous husband, Liang San-jie said that she engaged in various labouring occupations and took up many sidelines and part-time jobs in her past. She even held three jobs at the same time for a long period before she eventually worked as a street cleaner and obtained a

stable income from this up to her retirement. Her old mother-in-law also needed to help her in maintaining the household living throughout her lifetime. Sadly, by her own account, she had once again suffered from a sense of domestic incompleteness and maintained an empty household with an unfinished personal dream.

Specifically, Liang San-jie recalled that when her only son grew up and started to plan his career, Liang San-jie realised that he longed for an opportunity to see the outside world. In 1964, he achieved his ambition as he eventually followed his uncle to work abroad in Britain. At first, she felt it was an excellent opportunity for her son because as a man he should not have to stick in the village like her for life and should have wider horizons. But, she totally failed to anticipate that her son would turn out to love the foreign world so much instead of the village home. Whenever she called her son on the phone asking him to come back, he always emphasised the business of his work there. Worse, he gained his own household in Britain and unusually had two English wives with three children under one roof. But, none of his household members could speak Chinese with her. They also never came to the village to visit her:

“Yes, I could say: I now have my own daughter-in-law, not only one but rather two, and three grandchildren. As I know, the youngest one has almost finished his secondary education. Happy? I should be so. But, indeed, I never see them or hug them. I always live on my own within these four walls. No one to talk to! No one to share my feelings.

Sometimes, when my son phones me, he did ask his wives and children to talk with me. But, it is meaningless! I know nothing about what they are saying. Having talk or having no talk is one and the same. OK! Let it be. My son loves them. He should have his own world”.

“All that I could hope now is that he would take his children to see me with his wives before I pass away. One summer, he truly promised me to do so. I of course was delighted up to the sky. He also asked me to clean up the house because the Westerner is extremely sanitary. So, I really worked to clean up everything in the expectation of their visiting. What’s more, I worked to fix an air-con unit at home as some people told me that the Westerner hates the heat too.”

“But, by the end of the day, my son suddenly phoned me again. He said that he had had a big quarrel with his wives. He failed to bring his wives and children to see me. I immediately could not hold myself but cried and cried. He also cried and said sorry and he was unfilial again and again. After that, I seldom ask him again for taking them to see me. It is so unhappy!”

Liang San-jie has now been separated from her sole son for over thirty-five years.

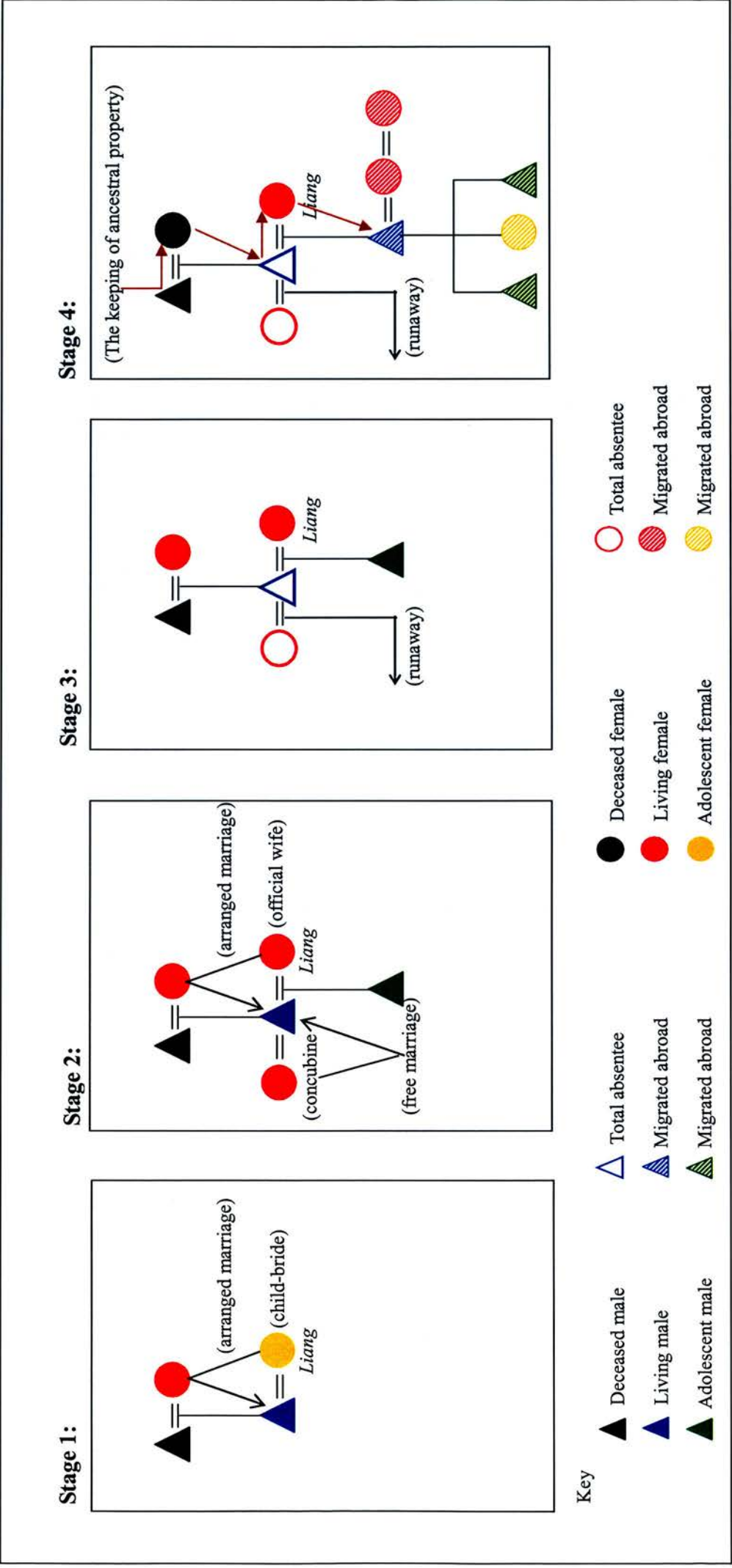
She feels it is increasingly improbable that there will be a household reunion in her remaining lifetime. Despite the fact that her son has come back on his own three times, he has never stopped for long and has shown no interest in living in his home village. On his last visit, Liang San-jie recalled that he mainly returned to sell his *Ding Quan* (official allowance to build a small house) to a property developer. Throughout his long settlement abroad, he also simply left both household and communal ancestral landed business and other ritual affairs to her care. She has therefore frequently acted

on his behalf. For example, she regularly joined the lineage meetings in the village. The people in the village also used to deal directly with her when they needed to discuss their common lineage matters.

In her household, Liang San-jie told me that she undertakes all the routines for the household property, which include her present simple and old-fashioned residence, and another single-storeyed stone house in the village with two to three little farm plots. The rent she obtains from them is the source of her living in addition to her personal retirement fund of about \$3,000 per month. However, Liang San-jie emphasized that her living expenses were few. She normally banked most regular rental earnings from the household property and the other occasional benefits from the clan. Recently, she prepared her will and has been working to change the official entitlement of the household property into her son's name:

“In fact, I never blame my son. I also don't like him to blame him as an ‘unfilial son’, for no matter filial or not, he is my son. The difficulty is only because he is living so far away and that he has been for so many years. But, I cannot help privately feeling sad about this old house where I live. See! I keep it so well. In fact, it should be kept and kept from generation to generation. I have also changed the entitlement of it to my son's from mine recently, as it is sure that I cannot take this with me into the coffin. But, I, know, clearly know, my son has no interest in living here again. He will sell this old house as soon as I pass away. It is a real pity.”

Figure 6.5: The development of female-head family in Liang San-mei's household



Discussion: men and women under patriarchy

Deniz Kandiyoti has pointed to a theoretical necessity of making more careful use of the concept of patriarchy. She found existing literatures have adopted this concept without adequate attention to the features that this concept has now evoked, in her words, “an overly monolithic conception of male dominance” (1997, p.86). The ethnographic accounts of the practical conduct of both men and women presented in this chapter show that the extreme patriarchal values and institutions, which constitute their overall communal order, as discussed in the last chapter, do not reflect the actual practices of living. Conceptually, these patriarchal values and institutions represent what Kandiyoti described as the “classic patriarchy”—the close interplay of patriliney, patrilocality and *patria potestas* in their most rigorous fashions (1997, p.89). However, there are indications from these vignettes of village life that the continuity of household and that of the immediately living community at large must depend on the mutual supports between the two sexes and their various substantial contributions beyond the patriarchal order. In reality, the patriarchal order also is not possible except as an ideology. Even if the ideology affects household lives, it can seldom be applied wholesale to suit the ever-present domestic contingencies and complexities. On the contrary, its constitutional adherence to patrilineal and paternal rule as indicated by the people’s life stories discussed in this chapter frequently imposes

unbearable burdens upon both men and women in the creation of their deep depression or even lifelong distortion. Although patriarchy as a sexist system of domination by definition enables the male authority in their family and society at large, the important issue to point out here nevertheless is not how a man as a patriarch wields his imagined domestic privilege and power. Instead, it is how a man as *a person* fails to achieve the basic ideas and anticipations of the prevailing patrilineal and patriarchal discourse around him. In the practical circumstance, the fundamental operation of patriarchy at the ground level can even entirely fall into women on behalf of the official patriarch. Women are transitory and invisible members of the official patrilineal and patriarchal constitution but they have their own domestic dynamics and influential communal positions on the ground. They are the essential agents in the substantial continuity of the household and community with their various unremarked subject-effects in the creation and re-creation of social reality in their own right. To pick up more on this important sex-specific aspect in the practice of Chinese village people in their domestic and communal life, in the next chapter I provide a special discussion of the An He village women.

Chapter 7: The domestic politics of village women

Introduction

By focusing on the women in An He village and their subtle but significant domestic politics, this chapter argues that village women are active agents in frequently reclaiming aspects of their personal autonomy and developing their social and political capital within the village and its surrounding area. This chapter concludes by discussing the reflexivity of village women and their transgressions of the hegemonic patrilineal and patriarchal colonial discourses and institutions. The general objective of this discussion is to show that women's domestic existence is never a wholly domesticated one but rather contains elements of radical self-articulation and subversive actions. To borrow a more precise notion from feminist discourse, there is much 'patriarchal bargaining' that is, women's engagements with the sexist circumstances under patriarchy in the creation of their own strategies.¹

¹ For discussions of the notion of 'patriarchal bargaining', see, for example, Agarwal (1994 & 1997), Kabeer (1998), Kandiyoti (1997 & 1998) and Sen (1983 & 1990), all of whom have elaborated this notion within feminist researches and gender studies.

I. Female action repertoires and women's community

For most of their daily life village women are occupied by domestic routines such as cooking, cleaning, sweeping, washing, keeping the household, serving their husband, nursing their children and looking after the elderly. In addition, men also commonly leave the necessary but routine management of the domestic ancestral religious and landed business to women. Many village women therefore have to undertake additional household tasks including day-to-day ancestral worship, customary ceremonies for ancestors with special sacrifices during large festivals, regular collection of rent from tenants, and other occasional miscellaneous work for the ancestral property (e.g., passing on of information, delivering rent bills and receipts, banking and keeping accounts).

For instance, Huang Jie-ying, a middle-aged woman about forty-five years old, told me during an interview that she is one of the few full-time mothers in the village. She lives in a well-to-do household and dwells in an elaborate, three-storeyed Spanish style house with a spacious and well-planted garden opposite the village entrance. Her husband runs a canteen in a newly developed town. In his normal daily schedule, he travels to work in the early morning and returns home late at night. In these circumstances, Huang Jie-ying does almost all of the daily tasks of looking after her

Figure 7.1: A full-time housewife's daily domestic routines in the village

Morning:	1) Preparing breakfast for her daughters or taking them to have breakfast outside
	2) Taking her two little daughters to their primary school*
	3) Visiting the marketplace, buying daily provisions and other household necessities
	4) Returning home and undertaking chores (e.g., sweeping, cleaning, ironing, tidying up the household effects, feeding the pets (i.e., a dog and two tanks of goldfish), cutting grass or gardening, etc.)
Noon:	5) Going to see her two little daughters after school
	6) Bringing her two little daughters to have lunch outside or making lunch for them at home
	7) Guiding and helping her two little daughters to do homework and studying
	8) Playing with her daughters at home or bringing them out of home to play with other village children
	9) Presenting incense and worshipping the ancestral altar
	10) Undertaking the usual management of the family property (e.g., meeting with tenants, collecting and banking rent, keeping the account and record, etc.)
Evening:	11) Cooking dinner and washing the utensils after dinner
	12) Tidying up the kitchen and clearing the daily rubbish
	13) Washing clothes and hanging out the washing on the roof
	14) Taking rest and watching television programme
	15) Making tea and refreshment for her returned husband
	16) End of a day of her usual household life and going to sleep

*Huang Jie-Ying's eldest daughter is a lower secondary school student and is fifteen. She usually starts her day and goes to school on her own.

her three daughters on her own. She also usually needs to see to the regular ancestral business for her household. Figure 7.1 is an overall list that specifies her usual household tasks 'in a day of her life' according to her perception. As a point of reference for the understanding of Chinese women, this list highlights some typical features of how women's daily existence is absorbed into domestic business.

Nevertheless, being absorbed in the day-to-day household duties does not necessarily mean that the women in An He village are all temporally and spatially confined in their household unit. On the contrary, they have a network of relationships extending beyond the village. They have established close interpersonal relationships with one another and maintain their various private gatherings as well as a public community life. The most common practices in this regard are to maintain frequent meetings and face-to-face interactions by doing their domestic activities collectively, taking rests and enjoying the cool air, and having their everyday pastimes and occasional entertainments.

In their daily rounds, they gather in twos or threes, casually chatting as they regularly go in and out of the village shopping in the market town and conducting other matters of everyday business. During their leisure time and holidays, they like to play mah-jong at someone's home, go window-shopping or bargain hunting in a

department store, drinking in a teahouse, eating in a restaurant or sometimes having a short shopping tour to the city. Throughout their intensive social intercourse, they frequently engage in various reciprocal practices and mutual assistance among themselves such as buying one another drinks or food, helping one another to see their children to school or home, giving one another their free labour to nurse the children or undertake other domestic business.

However, the most remarkable of the collective activities of women in An He village is their regular open meetings almost every afternoon at the gateway of the village. On such occasions, many young and old village women casually approach each other, leisurely sit on the public benches, and intensively indulge in chatting and joking over endless topics as well as happily sharing fruit, drinks or snacks, sometimes in small groups, sometime in one large party. In these gatherings the village women bring the children out of the house and let them meet and play with each other. Sometimes, village men will also join in and chat for a while as they casually walk by or when they feel bored at home, but they are rarely constant participants. The daily activity and collective mothering usually lasts for the whole afternoon until the women need to return to their homes at dusk and prepare the housing meal in their smoky kitchens. This activity constitutes an important aspect of womanhood and childhood

in the village. It creates a common level of village communication transcending age, generation, class and sex.

At a cultural level, these day-to-day action repertoires of village women are their principal ways of raising themselves out of the monotonous routine of domestic business. To borrow the pertinent theoretical term from de Certeau (1984), these village women possess subtle, poetic and artful, “tactics” to poach time and space, to crosscut the dominant order superimposed upon them and to gain small victories as well as joyful discoveries. At a social level, these day-to-day action repertoires of village women are essential practices in order to maintain connections, social circles, interpersonal exchanges and mutual exchanges of help. To adopt the heuristic insight from Margery Wolf (1976), they create their own women’s community within but also beyond the predominant patriarchal rule in the rural Chinese universe.² Above and beyond these two levels, these day-to-day action repertoires of village women are the main source of their domestic political strength and bargaining powers.

II. Female agency and domestic disputes

Village women do not simply group together for company in doing their domestic duties or to burn up unoccupied time in the daily routine. They bring to such meetings

domestic issues and collectively discuss them during their frequent daily gatherings and social interactions. Issues such as their personal troubles in their household, childcare concerns, tensions and even unhappy quarrels with their household members, are discussed. Sometimes, they want to share their feelings with their peers and to seek advice or ideas from the senior women who are recognised for their wide experience and wisdom. At other times, issues are explicitly aired as a means of extending their domestic disputes and involving other parties and in these cases they may be seeking external backing or communal arbitration.

For instance, I was told that conflicts between mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws are typical cases of domestic dispute. The last Chapter referred to an example of this kind of conflict in An He village, namely the vexing domestic relationship between the old widow Quan Dai-jin and her daughter-in-law Zheng A-xue. Both Quan Dai-jin and Zheng A-xue often expressed their grievances and denounced each other to their village fellows. When they occasionally ran into each other in the regular daily gatherings at the gateway of the village, they would engage in public confrontation, talking in deliberately loud voices, making use of some trivial issues to hold against each other, or simply keeping at a distance from each other and being generally unfriendly.

² For detail please refer to Chapter 2.

As their feud escalated, many village women continuously mediated between Quan Dai-jin and Zheng A-xue in an effort to improve the relationship between them. On some occasions, when Quan Dai-jin and Zheng A-xue lost their tempers entirely and the quarrels broke out in public, their peers acted as peacemakers to separate them and calm them down. In addition to this direct intervention, their peers had privately approached Deng Qui-ren and asked him to deal with the intensifying domestic dispute between his mother Quan Dai-jin and his wife Zheng A-xue. But, when Deng Qui-ren eventually began to beat Zheng A-xue, they promptly and collectively criticised him for his use of violence. In casual gossip, Deng Qui-ren achieved wide notoriety for being a “bad man” for a long time.

This case clearly shows that Chinese village women have intricate relationships and dynamics in the local community. They make their voices heard and have influence and shape other views. They even engage in overt and covert political actions against men and/or other women throughout their daily talk, ordinary occasions and social intercourse. Importantly, the presence of this female agency in the village is not just of relevance to domestic disputes. Village women are not simply concerned with household matters or private issues. In the next section, I will take a further step and illustrate how village women are agents affecting public affairs and

decision-making processes which ostensibly are the exclusive preserve of men.

III. Female agency and communal affairs

The Dengs in An He village, as mentioned in Chapter 5, have their own institutions that deal with internal public issues in their community. They organise communal meetings that are held in their ancestral hall and formal decisions are taken through open voting. At first sight, their internal communal meetings, which are nested into a systematic patrilineal and patriarchal hierarchy, help to reproduce a typical paternal political and jurisdictional structure.

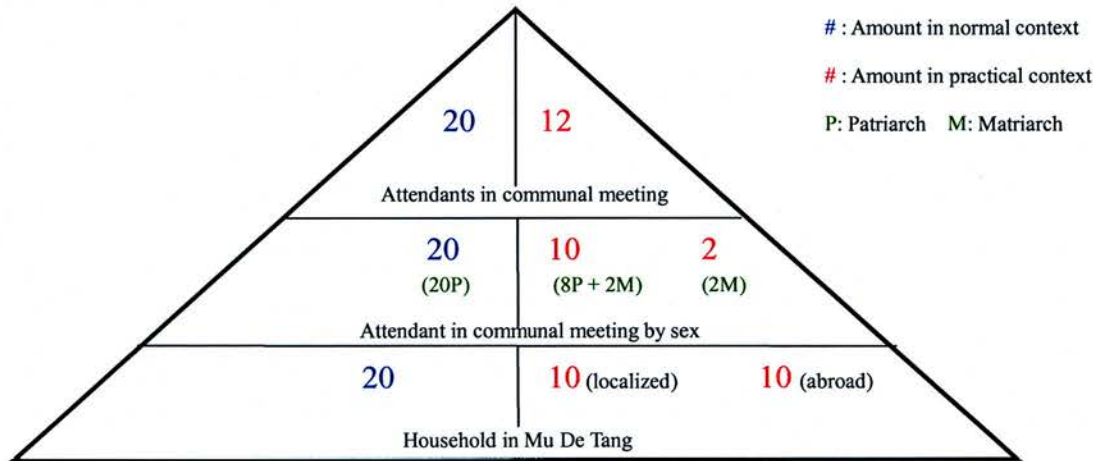
However, this exclusively male constitution is seldom completely realised in their internal communal political arrangements and practice. The extreme male-only participatory rule, which normally exists in their supra-village meetings for the whole clan in Fu Mei Au, is rarely adhered to in their intra-village meetings. For instance, the powerful Mu De Tang in An He village consists of twenty households. The normal attendees in their internal communal meeting should be the twenty male household heads according to their institutionalised patriarchal rule. However, the people in the Mu De Tang are not a static social group. Of the twenty households in Mu De Tang, ten have migrated and have lived abroad for many years. Even though most of them

maintain some occasional connections with their home village, it is inevitable that frequently they cannot attend the regular communal meetings.³ In two of these ten households, there are old women who still live in the village, and who act on their behalf and participate in the meetings and other public activities. As for the ten households of this Mu De Tang that are localised within the village, all but two of them have males who regularly participate in the meetings. But, in two cases it is not the normal male household head who attends the meetings but instead it is the female household head. In one case, the patriarch is not living in the village while the patriarch; another case is Huang Jie-ying's husband, whose business often prevents him attending the meetings.

All in all, the number of households in their actual communal meeting frequently is twelve (the ten localised households plus the two households represented by old women on behalf of their migrated sons). The actual proceedings of their communal meeting also usually include four unofficial but direct female participants (the above two plus the other two on behalf of their husband who is unavailable for the meetings) (see Figure 7.2). Despite the fact that the households should be represented by the

³ According to the rule in the village, their failures to attend the communal meeting only means losing out on the opportunities to speak and vote in the proceedings. They still maintain their right to the sharing of the communal goods and usually work to obtain their shares through the help of their closest kin in the lineage. This is also a very real reason why most of them still keep some connection with their natal village through occasional phone calls, visiting, meeting up with their fellows and so on.

Figure 7.2: The constitution of Mu De Tang’s communal meeting

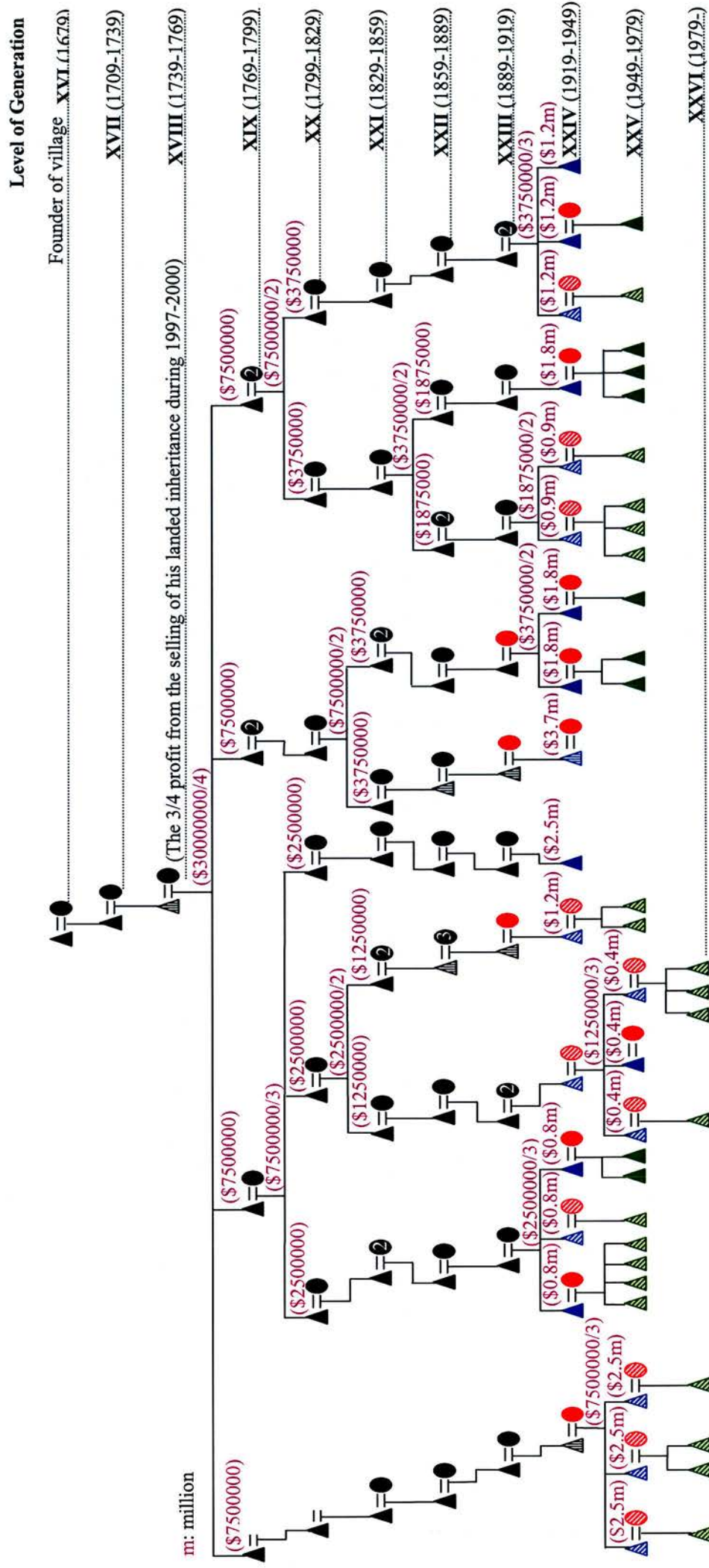


males in terms of the official paternal rule, in practice women can become representatives for the sake of expedience.

The normal communal meetings concerning affairs of internal jurisdiction are not the only domains for women to discuss shared issues. Informal and unstructured exchanges create an alternative forum and frequently substantial public actions are taken prior to official communal discussion and resolution, such as, collecting information, lobbying meeting members, making preliminary proposals, engaging in debates and even decisions in advance.

From 1997 to 2000, the people of Mu De Tang in the village sold a considerable portion of their collectively owned land. A close discussion of this specific communal decision should help to provide some concrete illustrations of this essential point. One

Figure 7.3: The distribution of communal goods in Mu De Tang



Note: It is essential to make clear that the distribution of communal goods to the branches is not done by simple equal shares of the profit among the existing smaller branches. As a rule, the Mu De Tang would first equally distribute their communal goods among the 4 capital branches or, in their own term, the *Four Families*, in their clan. The existing smaller branches within these 4 capital branches would then internally distribute by their own shares into more and inevitably smaller equal shares in accordance with the number of their agnatic branch at each point of the patrilineal segmentation. This Figure illustrates this local practice by showing how the Mu De Tang would hypothetically share the communal profit from the prospective sale of collective land during the period of 1997 to 2000.

of the *Si Lis* in Mu De Tang during that period, was their fellow kinsman Deng Qui-yi. Through his introduction and frequent mediations between the two parties, his lineage decided to sell a piece of communal land in their shared ancestral estate to a large private property developer. The size of this communal land was over 100,000 square feet and the market price per square foot was HKD\$400. The total proceeds that the Mu De Tang's could earn from this sale was in the vicinity of HKD \$400,000,00 (about £3, 600,000 in sterling).

In this regard, the sale of collective land from the outset captured all the Mu De Tang's people's attention and became a topic in numerous face-to-face discussions and deep happiness and strong expectations were expressed in these exchanges. When Deng Qui-yi, in mid 1997 represented their lineage at a formal agreement and accepted \$4,000,000 deposit from this developer, a special communal meeting was called to discuss the proceeds from this sale. Consequently, they decided to save up to \$10,000,000 (one fourth of the proceeds) for the future development of their lineage. They also had a concrete proposal to build four houses with 12 units for renting out on the empty communal land next to their ancestral hall in the village, thereby obtaining long-term earnings for their lineage.⁴ Above all, they planned to share out the

⁴ The collective building project would not use up all of the planned \$10,000,000 communal savings from their collective land sale. My field research indicated that the current cost for building an ordinary village house in the year 2000 was about one million and so Hong Kong dollars. The communal

remaining \$30,000,000 (three fourths of the proceeds) among themselves by agnatic branch. This sale of collective land by and large was an unprecedented event in their lineage. It would also bring a considerable amount of economic income of around \$1,000,000 to \$2,000,000 to most of their existing agnatic branches (see Figure 7.3).

Yet, this collective land sale was not a smooth process and eventually caused an outbreak of internal hostility and struggles amongst the people of the Mu De Tang. In late 1997, according to the lineage, the private developer suddenly attempted to cancel this deal with them and required the deposit back from them at the same time that the general property market of Hong Kong abruptly and critically declined. On top of that, this private developer had a strong case for breach of agreement, because of his discovery of an official mistake in the *Block Crown Lease* -- the earliest official land record of the New Territories produced in 1905.⁵

To be specific, the *Block Crown Lease* contains two integral attachments to the general deed for clarification of the leasehold. The first one is a descriptive cadastral list that records the lot number, the area, the usage, the lessee's name and address, the

expenditure for their building project therefore should be in the vicinity of about four to five million. They did not have any other planned communal investment as far as the remaining communal saving was concerned. They simply intended to bank with interest and use them as public funds.

⁵ For the unique colonial background to the rise of this *Block Crown Lease* please refers to Chapter 1. It should be noted that this *Block Crown Lease* as the very first colonial land record of the New Territories has caused numerous disputes for its frequent failures to meet with actual reality. Many existing studies have examined this colonial issue in the New Territories, to name some, Nelson (1996), Wesley-Smith (1982), Wickberg (1982) and Chun (1985, 1990 & 2000). As a matter of fact, the An He villagers also indicated that it was not the first time that they had a land dispute because bureaucratic problems from

terms of lease in years and the crown rent of each land. The second one is a geographical cadastral map that in scale delineates the physical location, area, shape and topography of each piece of land recorded in this cadastral list. However, I was told in the field that this earliest colonial land record as the highest official reference of land in the New Territories produced inconsistent data in the present case. The area of the Mu De Tang's ancestral land to be sold shown in the descriptive cadastral list is smaller than that shown in the geographical cadastral map by about 67,000 square feet.⁶ This discrepancy in the documents created uncertainty in the validity of Mu De Tang's people's collective ownership of this ancestral land. In private discussions with them the developer told them that he could help them to fix the official problem if the price per square foot was reduced to \$32 (i.e., reduced by 20 %).

The Mu De Tang angrily but urgently called for special communal meetings in their ancestral hall to examine the whole issue. Many other village women who held no position kept their eyes on what was going on. In their various daily interactions

the *Block Crown Lease*; however the present one was the most extensive and significant one.

⁶ In this regard, I went to check the official *Block Crown Lease* for details. I identified that its geographical cadastral map did in fact show the same area as the Mu De Tang's claim, i.e., about 100,000 square feet. However, its descriptive cadastral list showed the area of their ancestral land as only about 33,000 square feet. Deng Qui-yi told me that he had contacted the District Office concerning this issue. The District Office also recognized this mistake. But, they needed time to check up the pass documents and there were numerous procedures to go through to correct the official land record. Even if the District Office did eventually rectify the information for this lineage, they might still lose their collective deal with the developer. The formal agreement with the developer included a temporary term that the exchange should be entirely clear in one-year time. In other words, the collective land deal with the developer could not be completed if he was unwilling to wait for the official correction of the information in the land record.

and social intercourses, they continued to ask the men and other male or female fellows for news. They also exchanged information and engaged in intensive discussions about all the twists in this case. Both men and women in the Mu De Tang, formally or informally, came to argue over a key question of the event: whether their lineage should accept the developer's requirement for a lower selling price or demand the developer fulfil the original agreement by taking legal action.

Deng Qui-yi quickly and openly suggested accepting the developer's conditions so as to avoid any other unexpected twists and get the deal done as soon as possible. Immediately, a rumour against him rapidly and widely spread in the community. His village fellows, women in particular, incessantly discussed this rumour that said that Deng Qui-yi had a private and personal arrangement with the developer. He was compromising with this developer in order to cheat them and corrupt their ancestral estate. Obviously, Deng Qui-yi became aware of this rumour against him. He then started to appear in the women's regular daily gathering at the gateway of the village. He utilised these occasions to clarify his position and, above all, to persuade the women over to his side. The four existing special female representatives in the communal meeting were the key persons whom he talked to most of all.

Despite reacting swiftly and sensitively to the situation, my investigation into the

feedback from the rest of the villages shows that Deng Qui-yi still did not manage to forestall the spread of numerous disagreements with him, from both the men and women in the lineage. They also felt it was difficult to make a decision regarding this unexpected obstacle in the sale of land. Even his elder brother, Deng Qui-ren, blamed him and once said:

“I really fail to know what the hell my stupid younger brother is doing for us! How come he could introduce such a fucker [the developer] to us! Now we are really in their fucking play. To bring a suit against him, we may not win but huge money must be used. And, we don’t know what they will do next. They are so rich. Not to bring a suit against him, we will immediately lose eight million for sure. What do we do? I really don’t know what to do?”

At the same time, many women not only openly expressed similar views, but also generally held a rather firm position on the case. Namely, that their lineage should take legal action against the developer because his behaviour indicated that he wanted to trap them. In a casual collective discussion, one of them even emphasised that:

“Absolutely, no reason otherwise! He [the developer] obviously cheated us. How come we are so easy to be cheated! Eight million is not a little amount. We must bring a suit, no matter what!”

On many other occasions, they also had private conversations with the four special female representatives supporting their case for challenging Deng Qui-yi’s suggestion. In addition, they called on one another to ask their men to vote in the communal

meeting for taking legal action against the developer.

I could not find out how these women privately persuaded their men and what were the actual results of their domestic talks or whether they actually did this. But, the observable first consequence was that the Mu De Tang' people then made a formal communal decision to take a suit against the developer. Deng Qui-yi as their *Si Li* was appointed to work for this collective legal action. He therefore hired a lawyer for professional advice and was engaged in checking up all information and documents related to this case for a long time. He surely must have felt deeply disappointed and discontented about this communal decision. In private he would complain that "the long hair" [i.e., women] created this problem and had brought him nothing but trouble.

It is hard to say which side eventually won or lost in this internal communal dispute of the Mu De Tang's people. When I carried out a follow-up visit to the field in 2001 (i.e., 2 years after its commencement), both the men and the women had changed their minds and accepted, through a private settlement, the developer's requirement for a reduction in the dealing price. Their most cited reason was that they found legal action to be inadequate in the fight with this developer for the original price.⁷ For

⁷ For a necessary further clarification of the background to this research finding, it should be noted that the Mu De Tang's people in 2001 had already completed the sale of land 6 months ago. The following two research findings also were taken from the people's recollections after the events in question.

As far as the original proposal for the proceeds from this sale, they have kept aside a sum of \$10,000,000 and carry plan to carry out a building project in the village. However, their real proceeds is

instance, Deng Qui-yi recently expressed:

“To begin with, I have already seen through that it was fucking useless to take a suit against him [developer]. Rather, we must depend on him to give us the money. There is no room for argument!”

A woman in the lineage retrospectively explained:

“He [developer] indeed wanted a lower price. What he said about that problem [the official mistake] simply was a pretext. We also had had a suit against him for years. But, the selling was totally held up. It made one very annoyed indeed! And, if we don’t sell that ancestral land to him, we would also fail to have another buyer.”

The lesson from this case is that the exclusion of village women from the public sphere is not absolute. Rather, the fact is that village women have invested their interests and influences in village life. They are able to open alternative forums and to have their own communal discussions. The scope of their active agency goes beyond their immediate community and extends to the colonial state. In the next section, I move on to discuss this important female riposte and practice in the village followed by a conclusion to this chapter.

actually in the vicinity of \$32,000,000. The distribution and division of the monies has also been reduced. The sum now available for division starts from \$22,000,000. The actual share for the four main branches, thereby the amount available for these four main branches to make their internal distribution, subsequently becomes \$5,500,000 (i.e., \$22,000,000/4). Taking it all collectively, most of the smaller branches within these 4 main branches can now obtain only about \$900,000 to \$1,800,000.

IV. Female reflexivity and the colonial state

Throughout my ethnographic investigations into the community of An He village, I frequently found that the women, in many contexts, applied reflexivity to articulate themselves; they were not a passive group. In particular, they actively voiced their reality and articulated their own gender-specific critiques of institutionalised sexism in their community. For example, Liang San-mei, Bo Zhang Liang and three other village women once casually but sensitively discussed why they, as women, could not join the clan activities in the general ancestral hall in Fu Mei Au at the top of An He village. In this discussion, Bo Zhong Liang was uncomfortable in expressing her emotions. At first she hesitantly spoke for the existing patriarchal norm on the grounds of tradition:

“It is a male place after all. Won’t it seem good for us to appear there? That is against the customary practice, against the customary practice... I do feel: it is not so appropriate somehow.”

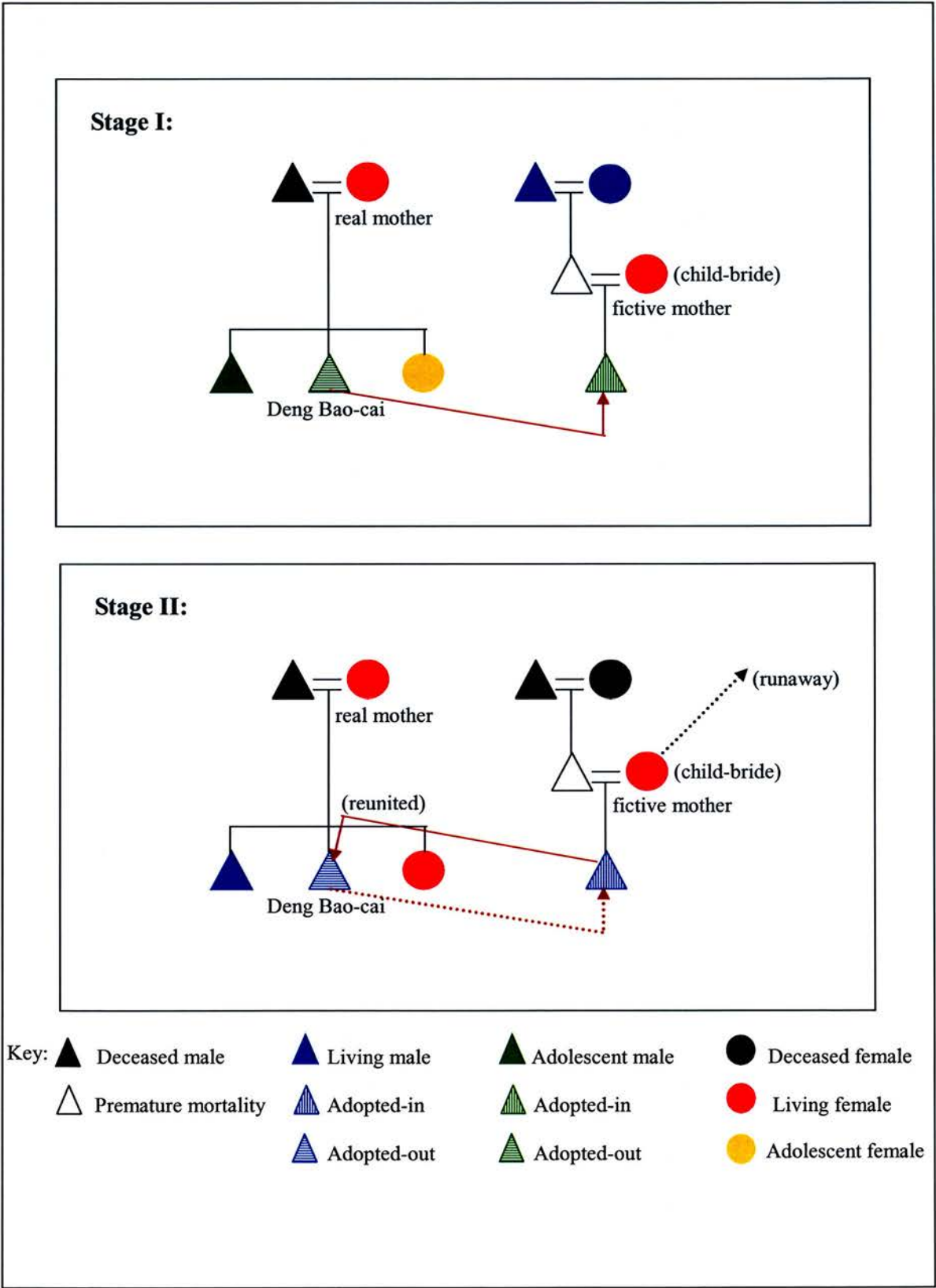
But, Liang San-mei reflected upon the case by applying the modern principle of gender equality to this case. She adopted her own interpretation to articulate the equal importance of men and women by a metaphorical analogy of the “wind” and “rain” in the creation of natural world. She drew on a fundamental reality of the village as a direct reference to substantiate her point:

“Oh! No! What is the age we are in now? The people talk about gender

equality. Women and men are the same. Indeed, this kind of old practice really should be changed. It is absolutely unreasonable. Just like this world, it must have both “wind” and “rain” to make things growing and keep things growing. Without their interplay, this world will not be all right! In fact, one will also never see a village which only has men without women.”

Likewise, the women in An He village also frequently reflected sensitively upon many other specific events or past histories in their immediate community. For example, it has been noted that Deng Bao-cai is the wealthiest man in the village. His village fellows estimated that he held a household fortune of about thirty to forty million Hong Kong dollars with a number of profitable landed properties from his ancestral inheritance. Nevertheless, the women in the village never took the existing paternal and patrilineal domestic order for granted. They challenged Deng Bao-cai’s enrichment by reflecting upon his peculiar beginnings in life, specifically his doubly mothered background. In their discussions of Deng Bao-cai they recalled that he originally had a natural mother and a stepmother at the same time. His deceased natural mother had been a young widow as a consequence of her husband’s early demise during the Japanese War. From the time that Deng Bao-cai was eight years old, she had sustained the whole household on her own, containing not just him, but also two younger children. These struggles were too much to bear and finally the

Figure 7.4: The doubly mothered background of Deng Bao-cai



household disintegrated. She was forced to sell young Deng Bao-cai to another Dengs' household because of extreme poverty and since that other Dengs' household was the most propertied and well-to-do household in the village, he grew up in an affluent environment. Nevertheless this household was unusual in that it contained an old couple and a husbandless child-bride as this old couple's daughter-in-law. The story was that this old couple's only son had died when he was ten, before he could complete his real marriage with the child-bride bought by the old couple for him.⁸ Worse still, this child-bride eventually committed adultery after both her parents-in-law passed away. She had to run away which inevitably left Deng Bao-cai (her fictive son) at home alone when he was about nineteen. Deng Bao-cai became the only remaining member in his step-household. He gradually came to address his natural mother as "mother" again but remained living in the house of his step-household. (see Figure 7.4)

Taking these intricate past stories collectively and relating them to his present status, the women in An He village maintained that Deng Bao-cai was only wealthy because of his natural and stepmother's sacrifices and that it was through them that he

⁸ In this regard, the villagers added that this child-bride was still formally "married" with her deceased husband-to-be as she had had a "ghost marriage" in accordance with an infrequent custom in the past. Under her parents-in-laws' arrangement, she had gone through a wedding ceremony with the soul of her deceased husband-to-be represented by a cock in the proceeding. She had become his official wife in the formal sense and as a rule had to keep widowhood for life.

had received the household estates and properties.⁹ Even in the case of his stepmother (the escaped child-bride), she never corrupted her household's wealth but instead fulfilled her duties. Both of them were more than good to him. But on his part, he simply claimed to be the richest man in the village and took the (double) advantages given to him from his two mothers. He never compensated for his natural mother's lifelong labour of raising him up above his station. In a casual conversation, women in the village once again discussed Deng Bao-cai and re-addressed the "appropriate" gendered context to his present enrichment in terms of their own theme:

Liao Yin-di firstly said:

"Yes, he is rich! And, what the hell, he is the richest. But, if it was not that Yu-jiao [Deng Bao-cai's step-mother] never ran away with the things [family estate] but passed them to him, that makes him have his goodtime now."

Liang San-mei added:

"To be fair, though Yu-jiao ran away with a big belly, she still did something good. At least, she is not greedy. In fact, her deceased parents-in-law also should not blame her. She became a widow so early. Right! Do you know if Bao-cai keeps seeing her or not?"

Liao Yin-di and other two women Liao Jin-zhi and Deng A-mei all showed that they

⁹ The information from their discussion of Deng Bao-cai indicated that both his natural and stepmother had been officially entitled to the family estates and properties for a long time. In the common understanding of people, it is a recognized practice for a woman to inherit her husband's family estates and property if her husband passes away. Moreover, her husband's family estates and property can be held for the rest of her life. It is uncommon for a son to inherit his deceased father's family estates and property if his mother is still alive. Even if it is the case, it usually comes from his mother's decision. Two more cases regarding this female land right in the local Chinese community will be given in the later discussion and chapter.

were unsure. Then, Deng A-mei turned to say:

“But, it is unfair to his real mother who laboured so hard and always went to ‘clearing the wild grass on farmland’ [a marginally paid agricultural job in the past] for bringing him up. See, what has his real mother got to live for in her lifetime? I really fail to know why she still would be so good giving all the property to him.”

Deng A-mei made a non-verbal emphasis on her argument by pointing in the direction of the crude house that Deng Bao-cai’s real mother lived.

Above all, these self-reflexive actions are not generally expressed in terms of gender equality or occasional arguments over the actual (gendered) meaning of a specific event or past histories in their village. They focus their reflexive senses into very immediate and concrete forces to make and re-make the social reality in their own right. They call on their self-awareness to lead to their practices. They draw on their hard reflections to struggle for their betterment.

The following case study is of the extraordinary renewal project of a house in the village during 1999. It describes how the concerns of a village woman, confronted with the collapse of the patriarchal domestic order, became a matter of communal concern and a matter of reflection in the village. Not only her fellow females, but also her fellow males, worked together to help her and they found it imperative to play down the domestic patriarchal power structure in order to come to her aid. Generally

speaking, her transgression entails a silent war on *a cultural right in living* against the *cultural right in law* and substantially demonstrates that she acted thoughtfully and definitively in her own interests.

Liao Jin-zhi is a married-in-woman in An He village about 65 years old. She is very weak and thin with an unhealthy pallid face and a pair of hardly opened eyes. Her countenance is a sad consequence of an over-laborious life. In the community, her peculiar personality is an occasional topic of gossip. Although people commonly appreciate that she has a friendly character and a great readiness to help others, they also view her as a “singularly stupid woman”. Her over-frugal behaviour, which includes reserving leftover food and consuming it for days and even weeks, makes them feel that she is rather unbelievable and ridiculous. In general, they view her as a typically conservative woman who unnecessarily disparages herself while looking up to her husband and son. One of her close peers said:

“It is absolutely hard to know what she thinks in her mind! Her mind also seems to be come from the Stone Age. What is the point for her to live so frugally? As I know, she had once eaten a little fish again and again for two weeks. It is absolutely terrible! In fact, she is not lacking money. But, she only knows to save up and keeps the best for her husband and son. Most recently, I even learned that she would feel sick and throw up if she has a little more food. It is ridiculous!”

As a matter of fact, her village fellows, both men and women, at times have

attempted to persuade her to change her behaviour. Once, a close female peer casually chatted with her about past events and hardships. She finally came to the point through a self-made idiom: "Things are made for using; the world is created for seeing" and sincerely explained: "So, why don't we enjoy life now? Wasn't it tough enough when we were young!" Still, it is hard to find any indication that Liao Jin-zhi has attempted to reform herself.

The story is that Liao's husband was the newly deceased kinsman Deng De-meng in the lineage and her son, the kinsman Deng Chang-hu, is notorious for his addiction to drugs and frequent involvement in crimes.¹⁰ When her husband suddenly died, she felt it too much of a shock. She sank into depression and would burst into tears again and again. Worse still, her son Deng Chang-hu during this critical moment was in prison. He would not be released until he had served eight more months of his sentence. Accordingly, many village women and men attempted to comfort her. They collectively helped her to organise her husband's open funeral ceremony in the public square of the village. Still, Liao could not hold her emotions back. There were occasional sounds of her private weeping coming from her house. Moreover, she faced a dilemma on how to deal with her husband's inheritance upon his sudden death. Her fellow villagers were aware of the matter and privately worried about what she

would do.

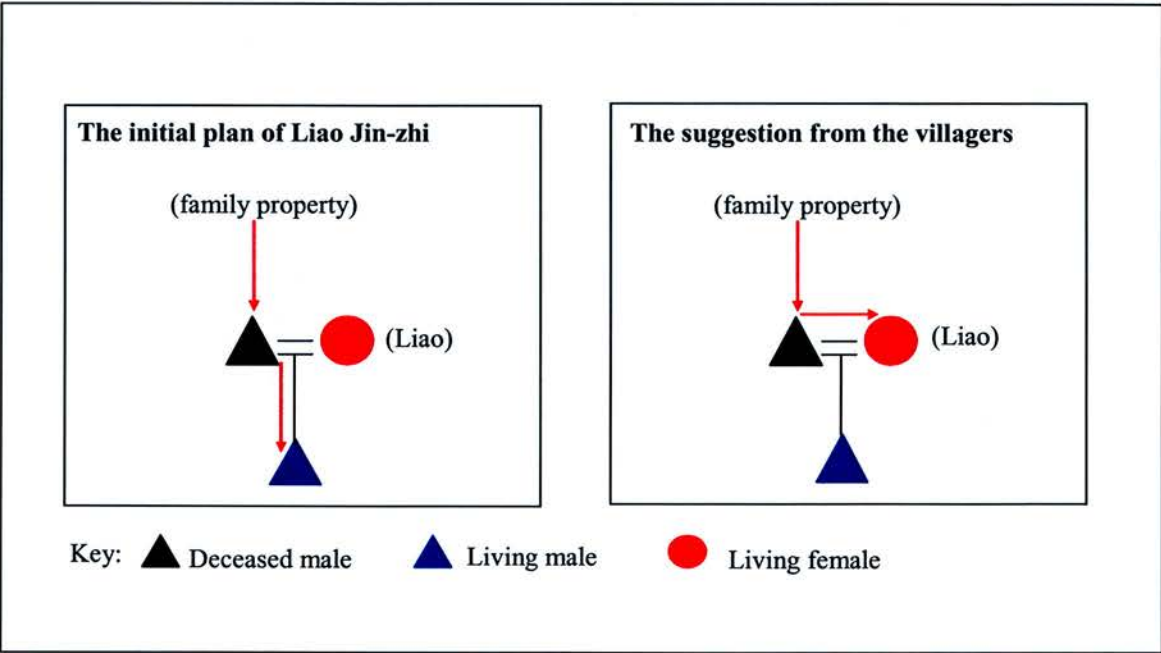
The specific items of her husband's inheritance included the No.8 house, No.14 house and No.26 house in the village with about one million Hong Kong dollars (about £900, 000 in sterling) in a bank account. Liao's household only lived in the No.14 house. Both the No. 8 house and No. 26 house were used for renting out but the No.8 house was currently vacant. Liao wanted to pass her husband's inheritance to her son and let him manage it. Liao's close female and male fellows hurried to talk to her when they learned of her intentions. Collectively, they stressed that she should immediately work to convey her husband's inheritance into her name (see Figure 7.5). A village woman even warned her about the possible coming dangers from her first idea:

“To pass all the things to your son could be almost to throw all the things into the deep sea. If he corrupts them and finally sells them off, what would you do! I think you may even find you have no place to live or stand any more! Similar cases do happen and are not uncommon in real life: the son will turn his face on the parents once he gets the family property.”

During various meetings, her close female and male fellows privately continued to discuss this matter with her and showed their deep concern for her too. In a similar vein, another village woman made a further observation of her case:

¹⁰ Please refer to chapter 6 for detail.

Figure 7.5: A comparison of Liao’s idea with the villagers’ suggestion



“If she is still so soft in this time, I really wonder how could she get by the day to come. As her husband has now passed away, her son surely becomes rather unconstrained at home. If he goes to beat her, how can she protect herself? You know, her son is a drug addict. When he needs money for drugs, he may really lose any sense.”

A village man also sympathised with Liao’s situation and once said:

“Meng-jin [the usual for Liao in the village] really was very miserable! She now is so old and retired so long; she should really think about herself. To rely on her son that is die-hard. He is so fucking bad”.

In order to help Liao, her village fellows exchanged their views and eventually worked out a plan for her. Namely, Liao should use the one million dollars left from her

deceased husband to re-build the currently empty No. 8 house. Most importantly, she should carry out this renewal project without making an official application to the Government and finish it before her son could return home.

According to their collective discussions, this idea was a nest of stratagems. The first point was to use up her husband's cash inheritance for a long-term domestic investment, thereby totally eliminating the possibility of her son's corruption of the estate. The second point was to manipulate the governmental rule by making a benefit of the inalienability of property, as the Government would never issue a letter of approval for the renewal of a unit that was established without advance official application. The lack of this official letter meant that this unit would not have a formal deed and it would therefore be impossible to sell on the property market. Her son would be unable to sell the No. 8 house, even when Liao died and the household property would eventually be passed on to her son. The final point was that Liao at least would always have a house to live in and/or earn rental income from it for her future support.

It was evident that this plan was deeply bewildering to Liao and it made her feel extremely anxious. She sought reassurance from the villagers and would ask them such questions as "Will my son like the renewal project?" "Should I first let my son

know about this?” “How about if he does not like it?” “Should I leave it to my son to make the decision as he is the only man in the family now?” and so forth. No matter how many times the villagers pointed out the great advantage of this idea, she was ambivalent and kept repeating that she was very worried. Some of the villagers increasingly felt that to talk to her was to “play a lute to a cow” while some other villagers became increasingly worried about her situation which almost led to a major domestic crisis.

There were many other twists in this episode before Liao’s sudden appearance in the forecourt of the No. 8 house one ordinary morning. Slowly but carefully, she silently worked with a heavy shovel and a heavy barrow to clear the fallen leaves there. Every movement in this task seems to be barely manageable for her. But, she continued to collect the mess of fallen leaves. Bit-by-bit she grouped them into little stacks; one-by-one she disposed them into an old bamboo basket. Originally, this work was one of her usual domestic tasks, which her deceased husband had accorded her. This was however the last time that she would do this task as she had somehow come to terms with the decision that the No. 8 house had to be re-built.

Discussion: the bottom-up influences of domestic women

It has long been argued that lacking a recognised status in public sphere is an essential area of concern for women.¹¹ My ethnographic discussion should already have shown how Chinese village women in the New Territories confront this critical circumstance. However, the domestic sphere, as Patricia Jeffery et al (1989) have pointed out, and the public sphere are intricately linked, and women in practice have interests in both.

To be specific, the present village case reveals that the domestic sphere as a hidden part of the fabric of the community contains in itself various remarkable female dynamics. It is there that Chinese women have their intensive discussions of and local politics against their household issues and even their communal affairs at large. In their usual practice, they also have their active agency to transcend their domestic being in the creation of their own social networks with their own public fora and communal life for and among themselves. The patriarchal exclusion of them from the official public sphere is far from complete. By operating as an acting household head in the name of their patriarch, some village women in the present village case obtain their immediate participation into the formal communal meetings and enter into the official decision-making terrain. Through their individual or collective

contestations, subtle manipulations and even fundamental subversions of the prevailing patriarchal order and rule, the rest of the village women in the present village case observe closely the official public sphere and are able to penetrate it with their views and influences. In these matters, the village *realpolitik* in the community practice also indicates that men as the superior gender hold the formal authority in the public sphere by the prevailing patriarchal order and rule. Still, the substantial jurisdictional and political situation is that men have to confront this active female agency from the domestic sphere with their intensive oppositions and various overt or covert interplays. It happens even on the subject of ancestral land, which surely holds an important significance to the patriarchs and forms an essential material basis of their power.

On the other hand, it is obvious that the Chinese women in the present village case have their own reflections upon the top-down patriarchal institutions authorised by the colonial rule with their own sensitive critiques as well or, in Hershatter's term, their 'talking back' to the dominant force in the ramification of their inferior status.¹² In their daily sayings and casual conversations, they are also similar to the description made by Croll for Mainland Chinese women in that they draw on their life experience

¹¹ For example, Rosaldo (1974), Sanday (1974) and Peterson & Runyan (1993).

¹² Please refer to Chapter 2 for details.

and self-perception to question the gender bias in the hegemonic discourse and maintain the order of thing with their own interpretation in term of their own theme.¹³ Although the cultural notion of ‘Chinese tradition’ has prevailed for so long in the New Territories, they have their dissents from it with their pertinent arguments as well. In this light, the case of Liao Jin-zhi further reveals that it was even possible for this active female agency from the domestic sphere to subtly manipulate colonial rule for their own project outside the interests of the patriarch and thereby immediately create some fundamental ruptures and disruptions of the dominant patriarchal discourse and institutions during colonial rule.

Thus in the final analysis, it has to be clear that a common invisibility did not mean that Chinese women were motionless and helpless without their self-empowerments. Their general inaudibility also never implies voiceless and actionless without their influential subject-effects across the board. Instead, Chinese women frequently have various critical utterances and hard struggles with the dominant patriarchal and colonial rule or, rather, their actual or possible socio-political influence extracted from their immediate domestic practices. In the next chapter, I further to show how in a specific moment the Chinese village women in the New

¹³ Please refer to Chapter 2 for details.

Territories could even tremendously speak out their critical domestic situation under the adverse patriarchal colonial order and developed into a large-scale women movement with extensive and intensive public concern in the general colonial history of Hong Kong.

Chapter 8: This is my mother's land: A village woman speaks out

Introduction

Deng A-mei is a short, small elderly woman, over 60, living in An He village. She has been engaged in a protracted struggle with A-jin (her father's brother's wife) and other fellow-participants for the inheritance right to her family estate. Her case even reached public attention in Hong Kong. Not only was it widely reported in the press, but the case was also generally taken up as a historical challenge to "Chinese tradition" as that emerged under the aegis of colonial indirect rule in the New Territories.¹

In many ways, it could be said that Deng A-mei's extraordinary personal struggle represents an exemplary case for our discussion of the critical existential situation of Chinese women in the New Territories under the colonial promotion of 'Chinese tradition' by the policy of indirect rule. Her personal struggle not only

¹ It was in 1987 when I firstly learned Deng A-mei's case from a casual conversation with some An He villagers and started my study of her unique land dispute with A-jin. In 1994, I carried out some taped interviews with Deng A-mei, her second daughter Zhou Shao-fen and other fellow-participants in the village. During this preliminary research period, my focus was upon Deng A-mei's side and how her fellow villagers viewed her case. Since I started to undertake the present doctoral research in 1997, I extended the scope of my study and collected the official land records, some legal documents and other existing literatures (e.g., newspaper information, archival materials and academic researches) related to her case. When I in 1998 moved in the village for direct ethnographic observation, I continued to interview more villagers for their views toward her case and made inquiries into the story from A-jin's side. As my observation of her case proceeded across different points of time, the ethnographic materials used in this chapter are unlike those in the pervious chapters which mainly come from my fieldwork period during 1998-2000. Accordingly, I will provide notes to specify the temporality of the essential ethnographic materials used in this chapter. The sources of the secondary materials and

comprehensively highlights how the multiple colonial and patriarchal impacts on the New Territories concurrently interplays with one village woman's life, but it also strikingly reveals what are the hard and real local processes in the creation of a general change at societal level for women's right in the recent history of New Territories.

In this chapter, I therefore provide a thick description of her personal struggle in order to further a holistic analysis of the importance of gender, in particular on the subject-effect of women, in the unique colonial situation of the New Territories. Throughout this discussion, special attention is paid to the subject matter of how the radical sense and capacity of Chinese women, as Margery Wolf (1974) pointed out, is due precisely to the long and deep patriarchal suppression of them in their immediate household and community life.² In the final section, I draw on the account in this chapter to take a long footnote on the theoretical insight made by Bobby Siu (1982) for the discussion of how the active agency of Chinese women is of relevance to the making of history at large and not just to the alteration of their domestic lives and in their immediate vicinity.³ Now let me commence my discussion with some important personal and family background of Deng A-mei.

published information used in this chapter will be specified with notes too.

² For details please refer to Chapter 2.

³ For details please refer to Chapter 2.

I. Background

From Deng A-mei's own accounts, she was the elder of her parents' two children. Her father was a fish hawker; her mother was a farm labourer. Her younger brother died when he was an infant leaving her as the only child in the household. From early childhood, she helped her mother to do daily chores in their home and in the cultivation of their farm. In addition, she occasionally worked as a cowherd to earn some pennies for the family. When she was twelve years old, she even began to work as a miscellaneous worker in a construction site but still continued helping her mother to do various agricultural tasks. She was industrious and deeply cherished her memories of working with her mother and was proud of her hardiness and toughness:

"In the past, we were very poor. I needed pants and I had no money to buy some. I had to make myself one with some old cloth. Each meal, we only had some simple food like pickled cabbage and dried turnip, which was made, by my mother or me. Perhaps, we would eat the vegetable from our own cultivations. Sometimes, if there was some special cheap pork in the market, we would bring some back for our meal."

"In the daily rounds, my mother and I needed to wake up just after dawn and start to work in the farm. Since I started to work on the construction site, I was only able to help her up to 8 o'clock, as I had to go to work. But, every night, I continued to help my mother and worked with her to prepare the hogwash for our pigs, mill the grain and do other chores. Day-to-day I would only have a short time for resting before I went to sleep."

"But, we really were good at work. We could sow many paddies and make good yields. Annually, we could produce 3 piculs in the first yield and 3 more piculs in the second yield. You see! This was how terrific my mother

and I managed to work and how hard it was in our past. So far, I have not yet talked about of how we worked together to keep the two pigs and three cows in our home.”⁴

In her reflections upon her past life, Deng A-mei also discussed her marital life. She married her husband when she was about 20 years old, but unlike other village daughters she did not move out of the village after marriage. Subsequently, she also had five daughters and one son with her husband. However, Deng A-mei continued, her husband became a drug addict when most of their children were still in their teens. She eventually divorced him and decided to raise her six children on her own. Currently, her six children have not only grown up and finished their education, but they have also developed their own careers and households outside the village. Deng A-mei herself retired many years ago and became a grandmother of ten grandchildren.

Deng A-mei told me that her father suddenly passed away in old age in 1984. Her old and weak mother sadly became lonely and frequently felt very depressed. To keep her mother company and to take care of her health, she continued to visit her and look after her on a daily basis. She, in the meantime, asked her second daughter, Zhou Shao-fen, to move into her mother's home so as to ensure that her mother had adequate company and care. Notwithstanding these efforts, her mother passed away in 1987. Worse still, Deng A-mei showed that she suffered not only from the loss of her beloved

⁴ Deng A-mei's interview record, 22/10/1994.

mother, but also as a result of her death there arose an acrimonious property dispute that had to be dealt with immediately.

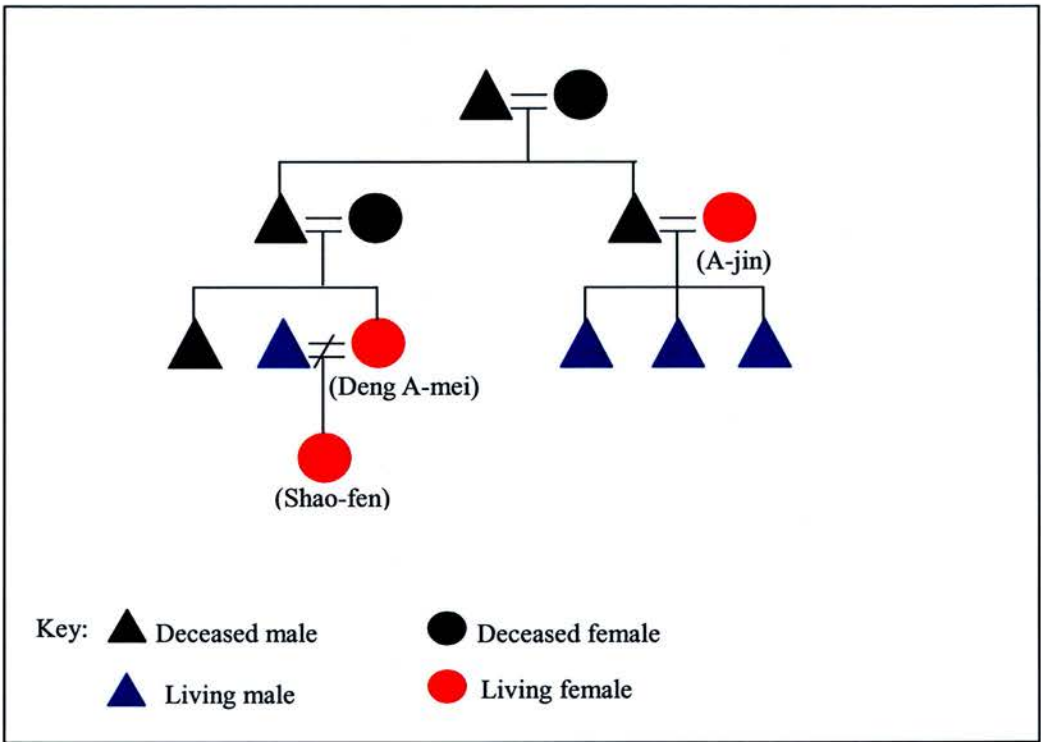
II. Deng A-mei's long dispute with A-jin

According to Zhou Shao-fen, on the day her grandmother died in hospital, A-jin as a close relative went with her mother Deng A-mei and her to see her grandma (Figure 8.1). But, on their return from the hospital, A-jin abruptly explained to her that since Deng A-mei's grandparents had no son, A-jin's three sons would inherit the estate and that this estate belonged to them in accordance with Chinese tradition and custom.⁵ The estate included their grandparents' three ancestral houses and two farms. If Zhou Shao-fen wished to continue staying in her grandparent's home, she would have to pay rent to her three sons. On hearing this, Zhou Shao-fen recalled that she could not control herself but angrily argued with A-jin: "How can you face my grandma? Ehh! You are so eager to drive me out and her body has not even been packed into the coffin!"⁶ Subsequently, she ignored A-jin's claim and continued living in her grandparent's home.

⁵ I will make more discussion of the complex lineal relationship between Deng A-mei's household and A-jin's household. But, here, it has to be made clear that A-jin's three sons are Deng A-mei's deceased father's closest kinsmen in their lineage. The rule of family succession A-jin invoked here precisely was the patrilineal inheritance practice which required a sonless household to pass their estate to their closest kinsmen's household which has a son in the lineage.

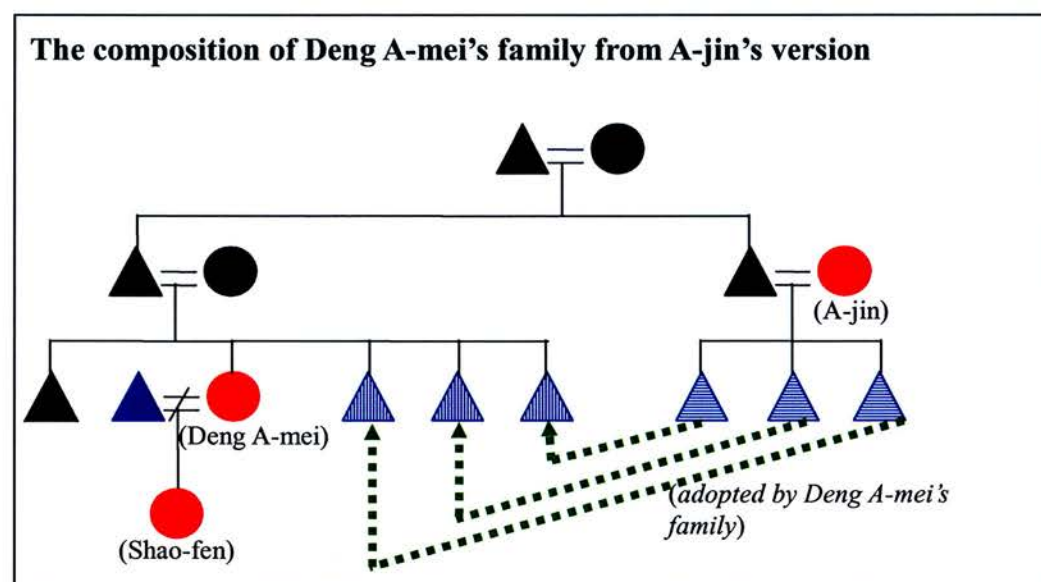
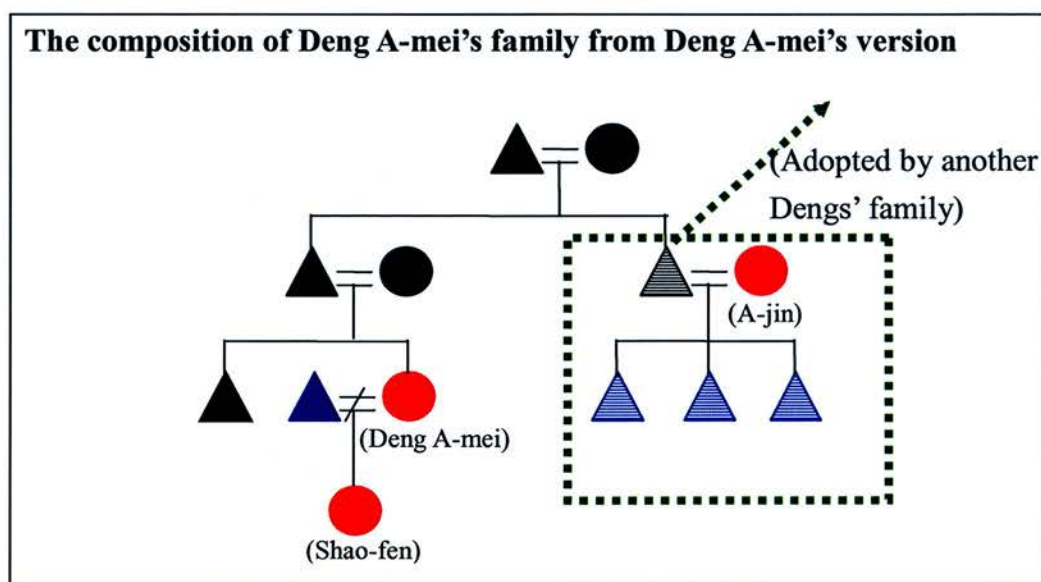
⁶ Zhou Shao-fen's interview record, 05/11/1994.

Figure 8.1: The kinship between Deng A-mei and A-jin





Deng A-mei indicated that this was not the first time A-jin had made such a claim over her parents' estates. During her father's lifetime, A-jin had time and again disturbed her family on this matter and had asked Deng A-mei's father to pass his family estates on to her three sons. Since her father's demise, A-jin had also started to pressure her mother and had openly claimed that Deng A-mei's father had adopted her three sons and thereby her sons were the rightful heirs of the family estates. But, Deng A-mei countered this argument with the claim that her father had never adopted A-jin's three sons. Rather, it was A-jin's husband who had been adopted by another Dengs'

Figure 8.2: The lineal dispute between Deng A-mei and A-jin



Key:  Deceased male
 Living male

 Adopted in
 Adopted out

● Deceased female
● Living female

family by *Guo Ji* (Figure 8.2). A-jin's family worshipped another Dengs' family's ancestor. Her three sons therefore should not be entitled to inherit the family estates:

"Yes, it is true! My deceased father was her deceased husband's real brother. And, my father was the elder; her husband was the younger. They have the same father and grandfather. But, her deceased husband was passed to another family by *Guo Ji*. I could make this statement against the sun [i.e., vowing for the truth of her word]. I am not making a story here. So, how could her three sons come back to take our things [i.e., family estates]? They have already got another family's things. The ancestral altar in their home was that of another family too."

"But, that woman [A-jin] makes whatever ridiculous story for herself. To take other's things, she can now say: she had given my father her three sons by *Guo Ji*. But, this is absolutely impossible! How would a person in this world give to another all his sons? Would they have no need to have a son to be the heir of their family at all? It is absolutely ridiculous!"⁷

However, Deng A-mei continued, it was only about a month after her mother's demise, when A-jin hired a lawyer to act on behalf of her three sons, thereby officially and legally pressing their claim to inherit the family estates. In the village, A-jin also spread gossip claiming that Deng A-mei had no real claim to her family estates, as she had no real blood relationship with her parents because she had been adopted:

"That woman [A-jin] is absolutely terrible! As if one story is not enough, she makes another one. She now keeps talking around in the village: I originally was an adopted child. What's more, she added: I was actually taken as a servant girl to work in my parents' home. Otherwise, the people would not usually call me as *Mei Ci*; I would not be lacking a proper name

⁷ Deng A-mei's interview record, 10/11/1994.

but simply called as *A-mei* too!”⁸

“In a communal meeting, she even asked the people to sign a document to prove that my surname was not ‘Deng’. At first, I failed to know about this event. But, some people came to inform me: she did this in the ancestral hall. They said: some people truly signed this document for her while some people did not. You see! This is how terrible this woman is! So nasty! How can you privately change my surname! My Hong Kong Identity Card also clearly shows that my surname is ‘Deng’⁹”.

Moreover, Deng A-mei claimed that A-jin had in private even mobilised a village leader to support her case requiring the tenant of her mother’s farmland to pay rent to her:

“I helped my mother to collect the rent from her tenants all along. But, she [A-jin] secretly went to see our tenant shortly after my mother died. Once, I regularly went to collect the rent from our tenant. She [the tenant] suddenly told me that an old woman had reached her. This old woman told her that her three sons were the new owners of the land; she should pay the rent to her, so on and so on. Of course, this old woman must be her [A-jin].”

“To begin with, our tenant felt very puzzled. She refused to give me the rent. As far as I know, she did not pay any rent to her too. But, later, she [A-jin] found a village leader to help her and went with him to see our tenant again. So, how could our tenant understand what was going on!

⁸ There is a common Chinese term to call the servant girl as *Mei Ci*. Literally, *Mei Ci* means “little girl”. The “*Mei*” in *Mei Ci* also truly is same with the “*Mei*” in Deng A-mei’s name. However, there is an equally common practice to people, the illiterate in particular, to simply name their daughter as *Mei* without specific elaborate distinction. In other words, even if a female is called “*Mei*”, it does not necessarily indicate that she is a *Mei Ci* (servant girl) nor, above all, that she has no blood relationship with her parent. At most, it indicates some inferiority of that female in local sense for being simply called as a “girl” and thereby almost being nameless. However, A-jin kept such an argument to undermine Deng A-mei’s stance in the event. Some fellow-participants in the village had taken her argument to negate Deng A-mei’s claim to her family estates too (see the following discussion in the main text)

⁹ Deng A-mei’s interview record, 10/11/1994.

With the presence of the village leader, she also became afraid. By the end of the day, she paid no rent to me but rather to her.”¹⁰

I must at this point introduce a general background of A-jin and, above all, discuss her stance in this dispute.

Findings from my interviews with A-jin indicate that she is one of the more senior females in An He village and is about fifteen years older than Deng A-mei. In local kinship terms, she also is a “married-in-woman” (unlike Deng A-mei who is a married-out-daughter) in the lineage. From the time that she married her husband (i.e., Deng A-mei’s father’s only brother) at eighteen, she lived with him in the village and had three daughters and three sons with him. Her husband passed away many years ago. Her three daughters formed their own unions and moved to live with their husbands and their children a long time ago. Her three sons have migrated abroad and have established their own families in the Netherlands. But they have occasionally returned to the village to visit her and keep contact with their kinsmen and fellow villagers. They also continue their occasional participation in the communal lineage meeting and regularly obtain their shares of the produce from their shared ancestral estate.

In the community, I was told that A-jin is notorious for her unfriendly character.

¹⁰ Deng A-mei’s interview record, 10/11/1994.

For instance, one of her peers in the village once said:

“That A-jin is an absolutely snobbish woman. When she lived in our village and still was poor, there was nothing wrong at all. She would go with our sisters to work in the construction site and be chatting and joking with us. But, since her household became rich and she’s built new houses, she quickly turned her face and came to look down on us. Currently, if she likes, she will still talk with us. But, if we say something she doesn’t like, she will bluntly swear against you. She gives no respect to you at all!”¹¹

A similar discussion of her comes from an old village man:

“Originally, she was a beggar and occasionally came to our village for food. Her deceased parent-in-law sympathised with her. They kept her in their home and eventually arranged her for their second son. That is why when she married her husband, she could not enter our village with a red sedan [i.e., the formal *rite de passage*]. And, some gossipy women in the village may nastily call her *Piao Lai Cha* [literally, driftwood, but conceptually a married-in-woman with no formal *rite de passage*]. But her character is extremely selfish and quarrelsome too. Even for a cent, she could argue with you for a day. Not a bit of favour she is willing to give another!”¹²

Since I started ethnographic investigations in the community, many village women and men warned me that she was ill tempered and that I should avoid asking her about her dispute with Deng A-mei. Otherwise, it was highly probable that she would swear violently at me. The end result was truly the same as what the villagers warned me about. Even though I eventually managed to talk on various other matters with her

¹¹ Ma Yue-rong’s interview record, 05/07/1999.

¹² Uncle Xiang’s interview record, 16/05/1999.

during my fieldwork period including her household background I have shown above, I still found no way to directly interview A-jin for her side of the story.

Nevertheless the stance taken by A-jin in her dispute with Deng A-mei is not totally unobservable. As part of her ongoing dispute with Deng A-mei, she frequently seized any opportunity to undermine Deng A-mei in her daily conversations with others, drawing attention to her transitory status as “married-out-daughter” in the lineage whilst continuing to argue for her three sons’ right to her parents’ estates. For instance, she had once repeated her main stance in the dispute as follows:

“The thing is of being out; it is really being out. If not, what does ‘out’ mean? The married-out-daughter is another family’s people once they are married out. They could not come back and take things out! In our past, we would even find it inappropriate to go back to our home village, as we have become another family’s people. As the old Chinese idiom says, ‘the married-out-daughter is equal to the thrown-out-water’ [i.e., she is totally removed from her natal home]. Every village should have this rule. But, that nasty bitch [Deng A-mei] is shameless!”¹³

In addition, local information has it that A-jin, on a public occasion, remonstrated with Deng A-mei on behalf of her three sons, for their rights to Deng A-mei’s parent’s estates. At the funeral for Deng A-mei’s father in the village, a senior woman recalled how A-jin competed with Deng A-mei to be the chief mourner in the event and pinpointed the critical point here as follows:

“It was really ridiculous! How could they [A-jin and Deng A-mei] quarrel with each other even over the funeral ritual! Is it not sad enough? But, that A-jin truly came to compete with Deng A-mei to take charge of the event and said that she only worked to represent her three sons who were in the Netherlands; that of course her three sons should hold the event as they would inherit A-xin’s [Deng A-mei’s father’s] family property. She claimed that it was their duty. It is unreasonable to simply get one’s family property without making the worship for him.”

“But, her behaviour was absolutely disgusting. While she worked to take the cup [a key ritual instrument] from A-mei, her swearing against A-mei was horrible. At that moment, I really didn’t want that the others to know that I lived in the same village with her. That cup was almost torn apart, if A-mei had not given up finally and said that she did not want her father’s funeral to become an open farce.”¹⁴

Nevertheless, there are indications that many fellow villagers generally supported A-jin’s position in her dispute with Deng A-mei. Deng Li-chang is another married-out-daughter in their lineage. In my interview with her, she accused Deng A-mei in a similar vein to A-jin:

“As she [Deng A-mei] was born a girl, she should already expect that a girl would not have any inheritance! Just like me, I never ask about my deceased father’s things and fight for them with my brothers. If everyone behaves like her, how can this world have order.”¹⁵

On top of that, Deng Guang-hua, one of the three village leaders, insisted that whatever this dispute was about, support must go to the male heirs. Not a bit of the

¹³ A finding from A-jin’s open talk with her village-fellow, 10/20/1999.

¹⁴ Liang San-mei’s interview record, 03/08/1999.

property could be passed over to the “married-out-daughter” because that would reduce the ancestral property. On one open occasion, he not only openly supported A-jin’s argument, but also empowered it by invoking the *Law of Great Qing*:¹⁶

“Deng A-mei is just a ‘servant girl’. She married an outsider. We must stand for the tradition of ‘bequeathing property to the male heir’. The *Law of Great Qing* also gives the male heir the sole right of inheritance. Otherwise, all of the Dengs will lose face.”¹⁷

A-jin in 1990 won her case, which enabled her sons to officially acquire her family’s estates. She had managed to do this with the help from Deng Guang-hua and a kinsman, by going to the District Office to prove her sons’ adoptions. She then quickly went to the Court and obtained an official injunction preventing Deng A-mei’s second daughter Zhou Shao-fen’s staying in the ancestral house. In effect, the second daughter Zhou Shao-fen was driven out of the house by the bailiff from the government. Two of A-jin’s sons returned to the village from the Netherlands and directly applied to the District Office to build a small house onto the two farmlands in the family’s estates.

Deng A-mei said that this turn of events deeply irritated and frustrated her. In particular, the most unacceptable fact to her was the loss of those two plots of farmland

¹⁵ Deng Li-chang’s interview record, 15/07/1994.

¹⁶ The *Law of Great Qing* was the highest dynastic law of the last emperor in Chinese history from 1644 to 1911.

where she had worked with her mother since childhood. Furthermore, these two plots were the legacy of her mother's hard acquisitions from her lifelong savings with all her laborious sweat and toil. The signatures on the formal deeds also were clearly in her name:¹⁸

“These two plots of farmland absolutely belonged to my mother and were earned by her sweat and toil. Up to now, I still clearly remember how hard she had worked on the farm. How difficult it was for her when she went to find money to buy the land from the landlord. ... Her legs would suffer from the serious rheumatism and sharp pains while she was alive. It is also because she had worked too hard on those two farms.”¹⁹

Still, A-jin had managed to obtain both these lands with the official recognition from the government. In my interview, Deng A-mei could not control herself and began to emotionally berate the traditional authority of the *Law of Great Qing* and the practice of patrilineal succession:

“What is that god damned *Law of Great Qing* to allow people to rob other people's things! Why as a daughter who looked after my parents that would mean I have no right to my family things at all? When I worked to serve my parents, where were A-jin's three sons? What had they done for my parents? Could they show what they have done?”

“When my father died, my mother was not entitled to get any land or house from him. But, when my mother died, why could they come to take all her

¹⁷ Field-notes on Deng Guang-hua's conversation with his village-fellows, 10/10/1994.

¹⁸ Deng A-mei still keeps the official deeds of these two plots of farmland. Accordingly, she failed to understand why A-jin could eventually manage to obtain them in both formal and legal way. She guessed that A-jin might claim to have lost the deeds when she applied to the government for her son's acquisition of her mother's land. In this regard, Deng A-mei also had shown me these two important land deeds which truly indicate that the owner is her mother and thereby confirmed her claim.

¹⁹ Deng A-mei's interview record, 10/11/1994.

land? Even it [*The Law of Great Qing*] upholds the rule: ‘bequeathing to men not women’, they at most are able to get my father’s things. Why could they also take my mother’s land? ... They [fellow villagers] said that they could do so because she was related to him as his wife. O.K.! The wife is related to her husband. Why could it not go the other way round? It is absolutely indefensible!”²⁰

To fight back for her parent’s property, Deng A-mei told me that she subsequently hired a lawyer to act on behalf of her case. In 1993, she persuaded a lawyer in the official Legal Aid Department to take up the lawsuit for her. She also worked on her own to pursue all possible avenues for her case. For instance, she had at times tried to photograph the ancestral altar in A-jin’s home so as to produce material proof that A-jin’s family was under another branch of Deng clan. But, she could not take this photo as A-jin always closed the door of her house. She had gone out of her way to reach some of the fellow-villagers who could prove her status as her father’s real daughter. But no one was willing to help her, even though in private they recognized her claim.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to point out that the matter of land ownership in the New Territories suddenly re-emerged as Hong Kong’s return to China approached and brought a variety of issues to bear upon the social and political agenda of Hong Kong during the period that Deng A-mei continued to fight back for her family’s property.

²⁰ Deng A-mei’s interview record, 10/11/1994.

Throughout this period, extensive social pressures surfaced demanding change in the colonially authorised “Chinese tradition” in the New Territories. In the next section, I draw on the materials from existing literature, documents and reports to discuss this important event in the recent history of the New Territories of Hong Kong before I continue to show the remarkable effect of this event on the development of Deng A-mei’s personal struggle in her village.

III. Legislator Loh’s involvement in the land issue of the New Territories

It was the spring of 1994 and there were only three years to the political change of sovereignty over Hong Kong from British colonial rule to the Chinese national regime due on the 1st of July 1997. It was necessary for the Hong Kong government to undertake urgent legal reform regarding the New Territories. This legal reform was raised because the Hong Kong government had to rectify a legal anomaly in the practice of the *New Territories Ordinance* under the separate territorial policy of indirect rule. This legal anomaly had arisen due to a common misunderstanding that the *New Territories Ordinance* referred *only* to the indigenous population and *only* applied to the village areas in the New Territories. However, the *New Territories Ordinance* in the legal sense covered *all* the people and *all* the land in the New

Territories and could therefore require the court to enforce traditional (patrilineal) inheritance laws regarding land ownership, unless legal exemption had been made by the legal owner in accordance with the exemption clause in part II of the *Ordinance*.²¹

Neither the Hong Kong government nor any of the two million urban migrant dwellers (about 40% of the Hong Kong population) in the developed or urbanised area of the New Territories, registered any exemptions. Most public and private buildings and housing in these areas remained out of exemption and fell under the jurisdiction of the *New Territories Ordinance*, even though this obviously was not part of the expectations of their owners.²² As a matter of fact, some legal disputes had already arisen in the past as a consequence of this common juridical and administrative oversight.²³ In 1993, the official department of the Hong Kong Housing Authority was required to make a public apology for their failure to apply for legal exemption from the *New Territories Ordinance* before they had carried out the public housing projects in the New Territories on the behalf of their citizens.²⁴

Concerning the possible social crisis rising from this case, the Legislative Council pressed the Hong Kong government to undertake an emergency review and

²¹ For details see *Laws of Hong Kong*. (1984). Chapter 97: New Territories Ordinance (pp.4-8). Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Printer.

²² Hong Kong Legislative Council, 1993, pp.1040-1042.

²³ Jones, 1995.

²⁴ Zhang, Jiang & Liu, 1995, p.126.

amendment of this *New Territories Ordinance*. The Hong Kong government finally had to expand the existing exemption clause in this *Ordinance* into a *New Territories Land (Exemption) Bill* and proposed this *Bill* to the Legislative Council. Also, the Hong Kong government endowed this *Bill* with a retrospective legal power to exempt all non-rural land in the New Territories from the Chinese customary law recognised since 1910, by the existing *New Territories Ordinance*.²⁵

Nonetheless, it was not so simple for the Hong Kong government to correct their juridical anomaly, which had largely been caused by their patriarchal political bias in the practice of indirect rule. In any case, an elected independent Legislator, Christina Loh, employed the moment to challenge the official policy of indirect rule and the rigidified Chinese feudal patrilineal inheritance practice. She cited article 26 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* which was to guarantee non-discrimination on sexual grounds and which was newly incorporated into the *Law of Hong Kong* by article 22 of the *Hong Kong Bill of Human Rights*.²⁶ Combining the principle of this international *Covenant* with the contemporary civic principle of gender equality, she claimed that the existing colonial policy of indirect rule in the New Territories was in practice, sex discrimination. It was totally outdated from the

²⁵Hong Kong Legislative Council, 1994, pp. 4539-454.

²⁶Jones, 1995.

contemporary context of the New Territories, which was now as extensively developed as the rest of urban Hong Kong. In her words, she publicly claimed:

“The society has already undergone obvious changes. Currently, the New Territories is not an old agricultural society still. ... Land has no longer been the basis for the clan settlement in the agricultural society but instead has become a marketable commodity. ... Tradition surely holds its historical background, but the observable fact is all those objective factors in keeping to the traditions of the clan society have steadily dismantled.”

“We, as legislators, absolutely cannot allow the principle of equality to be compromised with customs of inequality. The mistake of the *New Territories Ordinance* was to enforce the last century’s customs in a coercive way.²⁷ [my translation of the original Chinese]

Legislator Loh drafted an amendment to the *New Territories Land (Exemption) Bill* presented by the government to the Legislative Council. In her amendment, she proposed to extend the *New Territories Land (Exemption) Bill* to include the “rural land” in the New Territories, not only the non-rural land there as the Hong Kong government originally suggested.²⁸ In other words, she intended that all the New Territories would come under the *General Law of Hong Kong* where if a deceased did not prepare any will, his property would be divided into two equal shares; one for the

²⁷ Ming Po, 31/03/94.

²⁸ In the official terminology, “rural land” in the New Territories refers to the “old schedule lot”, “village lot”, “small house” and “similar rural holding”. For their legal definitions see *Laws of Hong Kong*. Chapter 150: The New Territories Leases (Extension) Ordinance. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Printer. But, it has to be noted that the “rural land” exactly is where most indigenous (male) inhabitants in the New Territories hold their individual or collective landed properties as far as its social and practical meaning is concerned.

spouse and the other one would be equally shared among his children. Accordingly, the indigenous women would have the same inheritance right as men. The existing Chinese customary law, the male-only inheritance practice kept in place by the *New Territories Ordinance* under the policy of indirect rule, would no longer apply.²⁹

Confronted with such an unexpected challenge from Legislator Loh, the Hong Kong government did not argue with her but rather openly stated that they had “no strong objection” to her amendment.³⁰ The last colonial Hong Kong Governor, Chris Patten, also publicly showed his support for the Legislator’s actions for gender equality.³¹ However, numerous indigenous inhabitants (including men and women) in the New Territories vehemently reacted against Legislator Loh and Hong Kong government’s supportive posture on her amendment. The Heung Yee Kuk, as the highest statutory body representing the indigenous habitants,³² forcefully denounced the colonial government as having failed to keep their political promise not to interfere with their traditions and customs. Legislator Loh’s amendment, which was made without any democratic consultation with them, would entirely destroy the continuity of their clan-based society.³³ Huang Hong-fa, an executive committee member of

²⁹ Zhang, Jiang & Liu, 1995, p.126-128.

³⁰ Chan, 1996, p.13.

³¹ Xian Dai Ri Bao, 30/03/1994.

³² Please refer to chapter 1 for details.

³³ For details see South China Morning Post, 22/3/94, Ming Po, 31/3/94, Wen Hui Bao, 03/03/1994, Jing Ji Ri Bao, 24/6/94 & Heung Yee Kuk, 1996, pp.70-71.

Heung Yee Kuk and a senior member of the Legislative Council, also wrote to the Hong Kong press to counter the rising feminist critique of their traditional (patrilineal) order and practice:

The reason for the support of the amendment mainly is out of the principle of gender equality. This is extremely dangerous thinking. Certainly, the principle of gender equality is an undeniably grand principle. But, the existing indigenous inhabitant's traditional custom of bequeathing to men, not women, is totally irrelevant to the issue of gender inequality. Throughout the past hundreds of years, it was the need to keep the integrity of their clan society that made the indigenous inhabitants enforce the practice of bequeathing to men not women. Having different treatments for different groups of people is not necessarily discrimination. ..."

"On the contrary, the existing social structure in the New Territories has protected women to some extent. For instance, the widow can receive a provision from her family, the son or fictive son must look after their unmarried daughter and the daughter must have a dowry for their marriage and so on. ..."³⁴ (my translation of the original Chinese)

To counter Legislator Loh's juridical movement, Heung Yee Kuk rallied hundreds and thousands of indigenous men and women around the slogan "protect our families and clans" and set up the *Communal Headquarters to Struggle in the Protection of Families and the Defence of Clan* to organise collective resistance.³⁵ Swiftly and intensively, the Heung Yee Kuk launched numerous massive assemblies, large-scale marches and protests. More and more people, village communities, rural

³⁴ Hua Qiao Ri Bao, 11/05/1994.

³⁵ Ming Po, 26/03/94.

bodies and authorities were mobilised to join their fight. Throughout their protest against Legislator Loh and the actions of the colonial government, their people frequently sang various national songs to show their “Chineseness”.³⁶ They staged some mock traditional trials of effigies of Governor Patten, Legislator Loh and other key figures, sentenced them to death and set them on fire.³⁷ They recalled the past histories of the armed resistance to the British colonisers during their early occupation³⁸ and once they even publicly worshipped the sacrificed ancestors of the armed resistance, with wide media coverage.³⁹ One of their protestors even announced, to vast applause from the crowd, that he would bite and rape Legislator Loh if she entered the New Territories and came to visit their villages.⁴⁰

Various important officials and agencies of the Chinese Government became involved in this event too. They raised this event to the level of state political issues relating to the reclaiming of sovereignty over Hong Kong. On the one hand, they supported the Heung Yee Kuk’s counter-acts. They also expressed the view that the indigenous custom and tradition should be protected as this was what had been guaranteed under the *Basic Law of Hong Kong* -- the coming post-colonial constitution

³⁶ Jing Ji Ri Bao, 23/06/94, Chan, 1996, p.21.

³⁷ Eastern Express, 04/18/1994 & Dai Gong Bao, 25/04/1994.

³⁸ Heung Yee Kuk, 1996, pp. 78-79.

³⁹ Zhang, Jiang & Liu, 1995, p. 50.

⁴⁰ South China Morning Post, 23/3/1994, Hua Qiao Ri Bao, 23/03/1994 & Ming Po, 23/03/94.

of Hong Kong under the Chinese national regime.⁴¹ On the other hand, they voiced their objections to the proposed amendment. In particular, they charged that the Legislator Loh was part of the British conspiracy to destroy a peaceful transition of sovereignty over Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Governor, Chris Patten, was the back player whilst Legislator Loh was the collaborator. The Chinese accused them of simply wanting to create social contradictions and disturbances at the last moment of the colonial period of Hong Kong. Zhang Jun-sheng, the deputy director of the Chinese News Agency in Hong Kong, proclaimed:

“The problem now is someone creating conflicts, dividing Hong Kong people and breaking social stability. We hope the Hong Kong government will not breach the *Joint Declaration* again, which states that it is responsible for social stability.”⁴²

However, Legislator Loh also won substantial support from different political parties, women’s groups, religious institutions, non-governmental organisations, academics and critics, social work associations, celebrities and other public figures.⁴³ Under the threat of rape and the terror of physical assault, she still went to visit some villages and initiated a public consultative meeting with the indigenous inhabitants in a Dengs’ ancestral hall. Under the thick protection of a heavy police presence, she

⁴¹ Please refer chapter 1 for details.

⁴² South China Morning Post, 27/03/1994.

⁴³ Zhang, Jiang & Liu, 1995.

completed her rural consultations without suffering any real attack.⁴⁴ Once, she even drew out the *Chinese Constitution* that also codified the principle of gender equality to argue against the Chinese officials.⁴⁵ Eventually, her private amendment was passed in the Legislative Council and won 36 votes versus 2 votes against.⁴⁶

IV. The further development of Deng A-mei's land dispute

According to Deng A-mei, she, as an indigenous woman affected by this colonial law *The New Territories Ordinance*, participated intensely in Legislator Loh's camp. She joined an *ad hoc* committee created for this issue along with many feminists, social workers and other indigenous women like her. She saw the media and publicly told of her land dispute with A-jin. She visited Legislator Loh and attended various assemblies and demonstrations in support of Loh's juridical action. When she now talks about her story, she also loves to recall this event and feels great satisfaction about the successful result.⁴⁷

However, Deng A-mei's land dispute did not end when the Legislator Loh's private amendment bill was passed. She still needed to wait for the long procedures of

⁴⁴ South China Morning Post, 27/3/1994 & Ming Po, 27/03/94.

⁴⁵ Xian Dai Ri Bao, 30/03/1994.

⁴⁶ Hong Kong Legislative Council, 1994, pp. 4539-4589.

⁴⁷ Deng A-mei's interview record, 12/27/1998.

the court in dealing with her case.⁴⁸ On the other hand, there are indications in the field that her fellow villagers grew increasingly exacerbated with her and viewed her as a hateful troublemaker who had created the whole Legislator Loh controversy in order to destroy their customs. Throughout their daily meetings and chats, they engaged more into personal attacks and character assassination against her as well. For example, many village men and women continued to spread an extreme sexist rumour that she had become a low-priced prostitute since she had divorced her husband. They even claimed that she would engage in disgusting “wild fights” in the forest for some of her clients. In a similar vein, they frequently talked about Deng A-mei’s “real relationship” with her existing male tenant. In their daily gossip, they said that this male tenant was Deng A-mei’s secret lover. He apparently rented a residence from her but, the fact was that he lived on intimate terms with her and was having an affair with her. As her second daughter Zhou Shao-fen had now moved in with her, the gossip increased. The gossip now extended to claim that Deng A-mei’s “that-part” could not service her secret lover because she had had overused it in making money in her past. Her second daughter Zhou Shao-fen had now replaced her in this area as since she had divorced from her husband she had suffered from a lack of

⁴⁸ Deng A-mei’s interview record, 12/27/1998.

a sexual life.⁴⁹ On top of these personal attacks, many people in An He village collectively isolated Deng A-mei from their community. They seldom chatted with her or had any interactions with her. Some of them even claimed that they would remind their children to avoid going to her home or not to play with Deng A-mei's grandchildren.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, Deng A-mei expressed the claim that her village fellows had never challenged her face-to-face or disturbed her in the village. She still continued her fight to win back her parents' property and was deeply convinced that she would win in the end:

“I was a cowherd since I was small. I became a coolie at the construction site as a grown-up. I have been elsewhere, seen everyone and everything. That is what I am: a real shrew and I was known for this since my childhood. There is nothing they [her village-fellows] can do about me! I must have my things back one day.”⁵¹

Furthermore, I was told that the discussion on the part of her village fellows was not entirely one-sided. Their aversion to Deng A-mei arising from her involvement with Legislator Loh's action never caused them to hold back their deep appreciation of her as an extraordinary filial daughter. There were also some sympathies for her case as well. For example, a senior woman in the village once talked about Deng A-mei and

⁴⁹ Findings from villagers' open discussion during their usual daily meeting in 04/03/1999.

⁵⁰ Findings from villagers' open discussion during their usual daily meeting in 04/03/1999.

said:

“She surely is the model of a great daughter whom I seldom see. It is really difficult to find someone like that these days. Since she was a little child, she worked extremely hard to help her mother. When her mother became old and suffered from paralysis, her life in looking after her mother was extremely tough indeed. Day-to-day she kept cooking the meals for her mother and helping her mother to bathe, to change clothing and to go to the toilet, so on and so on.”

“She also frequently moved around the village keeping her company her to make her feel good, or simply walking by her house and looking from her window to ensure that she was fine. Whenever her mother needed to go to hospital or had something else to do outside, she came back to her mother to help her go in and out.”

“But, that A-jin was really overpowering! Even though her sons have the right to Deng A-mei’s parents’ property, she should not treat Deng A-mei so overpoweringly and always swear her. After all, she [Deng A-mei] was her parents’ direct child. She should have some rights to her parents’ matters.”⁵²

V. Discussion: female agency, Chinese patriarchy and British colonialism

At first sight, the rise of Deng A-mei’s land dispute appears to be ‘present’ and ‘local’ and profoundly ‘personal’ and ‘domestic’. The issue was ownership of three village houses of a common village family with two areas of farmland. The participants were from members of a kin group and all of them were ‘ordinary’ people. The venue was no more than a village community and it was a typical setting. In terms

⁵¹ Deng A-mei’s interview record, 10/11/1994

⁵² Liang San-mei’s interview record, 03/08/1999.

of the large area of the New Territories, this village community occupied hardly a dot. In terms of the seven million and so population of Hong Kong up to the year 2000, this group of ordinary people constituted an extremely insignificant proportion. However, the development of this case and the juxtaposition of it relative to Legislator Loh's action illuminates that the issues involved in this land dispute were deeply 'historical' and 'global' and extremely 'political' and 'social' too. The events were intricately entangled with the real conflicts of the colonial state, the post-colonial state and the patriarchs on one side, and the unique interconnections of Deng A-mei's personal struggle with Legislator Loh's juridical movement on the other side. Now I seek to unpack this multi-dimensional case and thereby produce some more general discussions of the unique gender practices in the colonial and post-colonial New Territories.

In the first place, this case negates some orthodox interpretations such as Freedman's Chinese lineage organisation studies, which produced a flat narration of the New Territories as a static society, untouched and bearing witness to traditional Chinese practice. By contrast, this case makes it clear that society in the New Territories is a highly complex congeries of experiences configured by multiple historical memories and practices. The village there is not a static homogenous

community but a dynamic society full of diverse agents who act relative to internal and external forces, resulting in practices of collusion, competition and only occasionally, consensus.

These multiple historical memories and practices range from the personal (indicated by the story of Deng A-mei), through the regional (indicated by the demonstrations by Heung Yee Kuk), to the national (indicated in the 're-invention' of the feudal authority of *Great Qing Dynasty*) and the contemporary (indicated by the arguments of Legislator Loh and the interventions of both colonial and post-colonial states). In the meantime, different legal systems at different levels have been utilised by these different agents to legitimatise their own specific positions and to challenge one another. Accordingly, *The Law of Great Qing*, the separate territorial *New Territories Ordinance*, *The General Law of Hong Kong*, the post-colonial constitution in *The Basic Law of Hong Kong*, the *Chinese Constitution* and *International Law* have been all drawn out by these different agents during their intricate contestations. Last but not least, the contemporary civic principle of gender equality and the historic values of Chinese 'traditionalism' had, at the same time, been used in collision with each other. The liberation of women and the re-incarnation of the old Chinese patriarchy had resulted in a situation where protagonists pursued conflicting strategies.

The locality of the New Territories is in a state of play where heterogeneous subjects, historical dynamics and socio-political forces interact.

Rather importantly, Deng A-mei's case further highlights the problematic patriarchal nature of the "Chinese tradition" in practice. By operating as an 'honourable patriarch', A-jin frequently obtained substantial privileges from this rule simply because she had three sons who were the lawful male heirs. In effect, not only did the village leaders and other powerful patriarchs directly help her, but also the whole community in the village generally supported her. The colonial state came to reinstate her claim over the heritage of Deng A-mei's parents with both legal and bureaucratic recognition as well. It is precisely due to the close complicity between Chinese patriarchy and British colonial rule behind the mask of indirect rule that officially and socially empowered A-jin, giving her an advantageous institutional and practical position in the event.

However, Deng A-mei's case also suggests that both the colonial state and the local patriarchy were never all-powerful and well co-ordinated. As the extraordinary episode of the Loh controversy shows, the colonial state had critical self-contradictions in their jurisdiction and was ignorant of some of the applications of indirect rule. Most importantly, their socio-political relationship with the patriarchs

was shown to have quickly collapsed and dramatically turned out to be totally irreconcilable as well. In practice, the patriarchs even invoked their “Chineseness” to play out their *realpolitik*. They collectively re-invented various Chinese practices in order to demonstrate their so-called authentic “traditional Chinese identity”. They suddenly shifted into the role of aggressive anti-colonialists and expediently drew a new alliance with the coming post-colonial Chinese state, which made use of the moment to valorise their political prerogatives and diplomatic stance against the colonial British state.

All in all, the real essence of this case does not rest upon the long coalition of the British colonial state with Chinese patriarchs. The lesson of this case does not simply rest upon the point that the colonial New Territories actually contained a concurrent patriarchal and colonial (and now post-colonial national) discourse, which suppressed women through its dominant socio-political structure. Rather, the importance of these events is that it demonstrates that neither the colonial state nor the Chinese patriarchy in the New Territories could totally determine the lives of the local community. Even with their long co-ruling of the New Territories, it is still by no means hegemonic enough to suppress dissent. There was no “male-only” to speak of in a concrete socio-political field. Women in their own right were always essential agents in the

formation of human society.

Throughout their blow-by-blow confrontation in the village, both Deng A-Mei and A-jin actively used the patriarchs to reach their specific ends. To legitimise their different claims over the inheritance, both drew upon their patriarchs to “act” whether they were absent, dead or alive through their subtle manipulations of the cultural symbols and powers. To obtain the official intervention from the colonial state into their private dispute, both also took legal action to fight for their specific interest. However, under their conflictual circumstances, neither the patriarchy nor the colonial powers could be really effective but instead they exposed their internal disorders, contradictions and vulnerabilities

In these matters, I find Deng A-mei’s deep dissent from the coercive (patriarchal and colonial) arrangement of her parents’ inheritance to be extremely significant and historically meaningful. Her personal struggle produced an immediate interruption of the critical manifestation of patrilineal and patriarchal colonial order via the cultural notion of “Chinese tradition”. Her open rebellion demonstrated radical practices to fight for an essential female interest: their existential right to land. In particular, her case posed a sharp gender question: why would a woman who put her lifelong labour in the land not be entitled to the rights of that land?

Nevertheless, Deng A-mei's position was not alone. Her deep dissent by no means was a powerless crying out in an extensive desert without any resonations and far-reaching effects. In the context of the Legislator Loh's intervention into the land issue of the New Territories, her personal struggle was shared with other similar cases and obtained various fellows' supports. A critical 'war on position' (using Gramsci's term) was aired out in society at large, as she "spoke out" herself and worked with other active female agents like Legislator Loh, feminists and women's groups in the recent colonial social history of Hong Kong. In this event, various existing social forces and political bodies -- from the ordinary indigenous villagers, village elites and Heung Yee Kuk to members of the Legislative Council, Governor Chris Patten, Hong Kong government, Chinese officials -- had to take sides and make their gender orientations regarding their collective action too. In general, there was about a century of colonial history in the New Territories of Hong Kong. Deng A-mei's case interestingly elaborates a famous notion of Karl Marx with renewed feminist meaning:

"Man makes history, but they do not make it just as they please"
(Cohen et al (Eds.), 1979, p. 103) (emphasis added)

With her 10-year-long hard and tough personal struggle at an end, Deng A-mei told me that in 1997 she eventually obtained a largely successful result to her land

dispute. She reached an important compromise with A-jin by private mediation outside the court. In this compromise, she agreed to allow A-jin's three sons to possess her father's three ancestral houses on the condition that A-jin's three sons returned her mother's two plots of farmland to her. Consequently, A-jin accepted this compromise as well (Figure 8.3). Her three sons also formally changed the entitlement of her mother's two plots of farmland to her. In 1998, Deng A-mei recalled this compromise as follows:

"To begin with, they [A-jin and her sons] surely did not want to give anything back to me. But, they gradually started wondering about whether they could win the suit in court or not since the law also has been changed. So, they found a village-fellow whom I am also familiar with to talk to me. I clearly told him [the mediator] that: as they said that my father's three ancestral houses were the men's things, it was fine. I could give them to her three sons and would never fight for them. But, I must have my mother's land back as they belonged to my mother. They by no means were their things!"

"By the end of day, they once again reached me through that mediator and asked me to see the lawyer for doing the official procedure to return my mother's land to me. So, I also went to see my lawyer to cancel my suit against them."⁵³

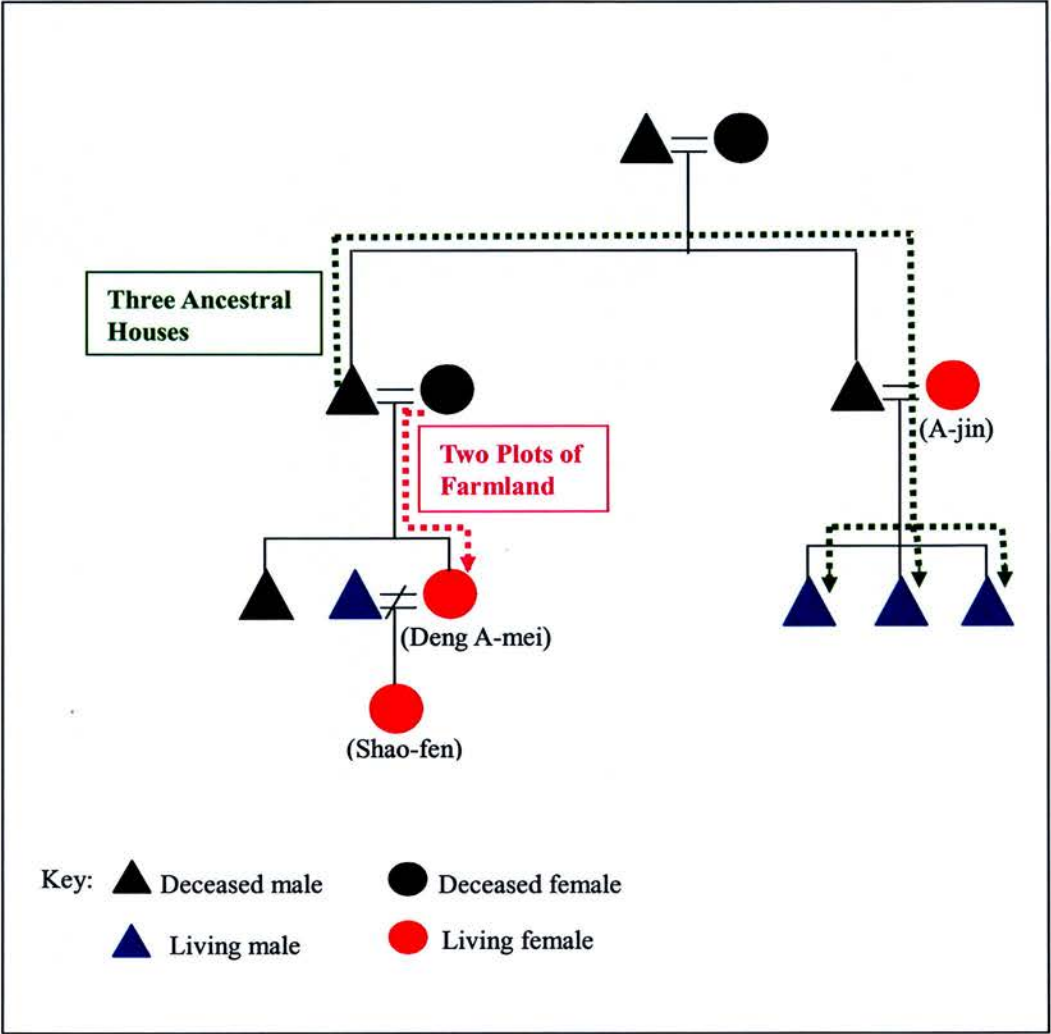
One winter morning, Deng A-mei led me to see her farms. On arriving there, she was overwhelmed by her emotions and once again repeated the many details of her struggle for her land. Out of habit, she unconsciously squatted down, cleared some

weeds and gently felt the surface, checking the soil. With many complex emotions, she picked up some soil and drew in the smells deeply savouring the aromas, an intimate act which she had shared with her mother whom she had sadly missed for a long time.⁵⁴

⁵³ Deng A-mei's interview record, 08/11/1998

⁵⁴ Findings from direct observation in 02/12/1998.

Figure 8.3: The end result of Deng A-Mei’ land dispute with A-jin



Conclusion

“There is action, and history, and conservation or transformation of structures only because there are agents, but agents who are acting and efficacious only because they are not reduced to what is ordinarily put under the notion of individual and who, as socialized organisms, are endowed with an ensemble of dispositions which imply both the propensity and ability to get into and play the game.”

(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1990, p.19)

I. A revisiting of the colonial encounter in the New Territories:

Recapitulation of main themes

With an excerpt from the Farewell Speech by Chris Patten, the last Governor of Hong Kong, on the eve of the Handover, I commenced this dissertation about how British colonial rulers ultimately justified their occupation of Hong Kong by appealing to the creation of contemporary political institutions and remarkable economic developments for Hong Kong. Colonial rule was profoundly the self-styled ‘civilizing mission’ in action, even up to the last moment. As Ashis Nandy pointed out,

“Colonialism minus a civilizational mission is no colonialism at all.”(1989, p.11)

This dissertation has drawn on various existing literatures and recent studies together with original ethnographic research in the communities of the New Territories

to demonstrate how local institutions subsequent to the colonial implementation of indirect rule in the New Territories changed despite the ostensible non-interventionist nature of indirect rule. Instead, it could be said that the policy of indirect rule of the British colonial government, like that of the 'civilising mission', was a ruling rhetoric for maintaining a beautifully legitimate façade which masked their real socio-political practice. The colonial encounter between the British and the Chinese communities also was one of unending conflicts and contestations in different arenas at different levels resulting in fundamental transformations on both sides. Since the postwar period, British colonial rule even introduced the great social and economic transformation to the New Territories for the general urban and industrial development of Hong Kong in spite of the increasingly obvious contradictions with their existing policy of indirect rule. It is therefore not simply to be, in Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh's words, 'guilty of half-truth' (1995, p.2) if one just maintains that British colonial rule preserved the local circumstances of New Territories. In fact, it is a total failure to see the fundamental historicity of the colonial encounter in the New Territories, a complex congeries of numerous consequential clashes, intricate interplays and ongoing contradictions.

However, early Western and Chinese Sinological literatures have developed a

prevailing orthodox interpretation of the New Territories with little attentions to these changing relationships. The important intellectual point here is that these early Sinological literatures are not without their fruitful anthropological or historical documentations of the changing circumstances in the New Territories under British colonial rule behind the mask of indirect rule. This scholarship is not without insightful discussions of the Chinese communities, particularly the formal principles and official views about Chinese people's lineage and other collective institutions during the British colonial era. However, their general theoretical adherence to the conventional notion of a 'traditional' Chinese society in the New Territories under the special aegis of British colonial rule caused at least one serious drawback in these accounts. The intellectual and political consequence of this theoretical approach is that the accounts reified the Chinese communities in the New Territories as a spatial and temporal other without real counterparts, and also egregiously validated British colonial rule, instead of attempting to understand the actual circumstances of the New Territories.

In order to go beyond these early essentializing Sinological studies, this dissertation has shown the value of a relational approach to the study of the colonial New Territories. Specifically, such an approach allows us to set events into the wider

social conjuncture in a holistic manner, and to be open to their changing features without forcing us to accept some ahistorical models or *a priori* claims. By applying a relational approach to the case studies of the village of An He in north New Territories, this dissertation reveals a considerably different ethnographic picture of the Chinese communities. Far from representing some uniform cultural models or inert institutions from an immemorial past, the case studies in this dissertation suggest that the living dynamics of these communities in the colonial New Territories were highly active and entirely fuzzy. During the British colonial era, people have generally shifted their livelihood from the past agricultural practice on their land into the growing industrial sectors of Hong Kong and even the marginal economic opportunities abroad in and only in about two to three decades. Since some obtained remarkable economic advantages from the recent increases in the market value of their land, the communities have become increasingly differentiated. In essence, the general continuity of the Chinese communities in the colonial New Territories always entails numerous shifting living situations and practices on the ground. People had various hard struggles throughout different critical points of times with their different voices. There is a great variety of living experience and that is a great deal more interesting in the colonial New Territories.

The case studies in this dissertation support the gender-specific argument of an adverse symbiosis between British colonial rule and Chinese patriarchy in the socio-political governance of the New Territories. By concentrating on the colonial reification of Chinese lineage organisation in the name of respecting 'Chinese tradition', this dissertation indicates how at the practical level British colonial rule subjected the women in Chinese communities to extreme patrilineal and patriarchal institutions. Colonial rule of the colonised Chinese people entailed both highly partial recognition of 'Chinese tradition' in strong patriarchal terms and extensive penetrations of local communities by new economic and political practices originating from the central government of Hong Kong. Women themselves were generally confronted with official exclusion from various public institutions, and formal communal economic and political processes.

Nonetheless, the case studies in this dissertation equally suggest that the gender dynamic inherent in the colonial encounter in the New Territories is not monolithic. It would be simplistic to view the rise of the colonial-cum-patriarchal order in the New Territories to have been fully successful or totally definite. Instead, there are indications that this colonial-cum-patriarchal order, particularly as it links to agnatic corporation over ancestral estate and communal leadership, seldom smoothly or

agreeably operated at the ground level. In numerous circumstances, the various aggressive competitions for more personal economic benefit and political status which were pursued by the patriarchs resulted in the creation of a great deal of internal disharmonies, deep cleavages, vexing arguments and even overpowering oppositions throughout the actual workings of this order in the Chinese communities.

There also are indications that the dominant patriarchal discourse failed to address the many gendered complexities and details of the actual domestic and communal situations in the practice of local life. One essential finding in this regard from the case studies is that men are seldom as capable and powerful as the gender role the dominant patriarchal discourse ideologically called them to take on for their household and community. The domestic requirement and social expectations of the dominant patriarchal discourse -- like having a male heir for family succession, men developing themselves with independence, conducting themselves as good example for their descendants, creating their career success and earning honour for their family -- are often beyond their real capacity or practice of men to be able to fulfil. Infertility, incompetence, mediocrity, stupidity, hedonism, idleness and self-indulgence, could become a critical vulnerability and even a fundamental rupture of the patriarchal authority over the household and community. In these matters, the obvious fallacy of

the dominant patriarchal discourse, of course, is its insistence upon male strength and might without taking account into indeterminacy and contingency in practical situations.

By drawing on the theoretical and empirical insights from existing Chinese gender studies and relating them to the field of the colonial New Territories, this dissertation illuminates how Chinese women in fact possess various influential positions and exercise agency beyond the control of the patriarchal rule. Women could become the effective household head of their family. They also individually or collectively crosscut the androcentric rule over the communal affairs with their close observations, frequent exchange of information and informal influence upon the communal decision-making process. In their casual conversation and daily intercourse, they voiced their reality and maintained the order of things according to their interests. They also critically reflected upon the prevailing patrilineal and paternal principle from the dominant patriarchal discourse in their community and even questioned the hegemonic cultural notion of Chinese 'tradition' authorised by the colonial rule in the New Territories from their own perspectives and an awareness of the contemporary civic principle of gender equality.

Thus in the final analysis, it is important to point out that neither British colonial

rulers nor Chinese patriarchs could be the only agents in determining social reality. The social order in the Chinese household and community also largely came about as a result of bargaining between the sexes and it was continuously subjected to local negotiations among different agents with numerous fluid aspects and rooms for manoeuvres as well.

II. The re-invention of British colonial rule

The new post-colonial era of Hong Kong includes the New Territories under the new national Chinese regime which has only just commenced. Clearly, discussion of a “post-colonial situation”, as some recent studies have pointed out, should not just take its meaning in a pure temporal sense.¹ For, the prefix ‘post’ here should imply not simply ‘being after’, but also ‘going beyond’ (Appiah, 1997, p.63).

Perhaps, it is already too late to put forward these questions for the order may have already been established. As Y. S. Luo (1997b) has observed, China frequently claimed sovereignty over Hong Kong on strong anti-colonial terms. However, China in practice has seldom proceeded to remove foreign and colonial practices from their so-called sacrosanct territory of Hong Kong. In these matters, S. C. Lo (1997) also revealed that British colonial practices -- their bureaucratic system and social control

mechanisms in particular -- did not simply end as colonial sovereignty over Hong Kong came to the end. In the name of 'one country, two systems', the current post-colonial Chinese government of Hong Kong was established upon numerous re-inventions of the previous British colonial rule. Stephen Vines even straightforwardly argued that the post-colonial Hong Kong has simply become "China's colony" and wrote:

"China's guiding principle in devising a new system for Hong Kong was to preserve the colonial form of rule. Moreover, the new regime proceeded to bring back some of the worst colonial practices in order to ensure that what the leaders in Peking call 'the glorious reunification of the motherland' became in fact a means of keeping the new possession under the control of the Chinese Communist Party". (1998, p. x)

In the case of the New Territories, I observed that there post-colonialism is not an end of colonialism. China has attempted to preserve the previous colonial indigenous policy for the local communities. *The Basic Law of Hong Kong*, Article 40 in Chapter III "Fundamental Rights and Duties of the Residents" states:

"The lawful traditional rights and interests of the indigenous inhabitants of the 'New Territories' shall be protected by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region."

Article 122 in Chapter V Economy, Section II "Land Leases" specifies that:

¹ For example, Appiah (1996), Kong (1997) and Luo (1997a & 2000).

In the case of old schedule lots, village lots, small houses and similar rural holdings, where the property was on 30 June 1984 held by, or, in the case of small houses granted after that date, where the property is granted to, a lessee descended through the male line from a person who was in 1898 a resident of an established village in Hong Kong, the previous rent shall remain unchanged so long as the property is held by that lessee or by one of his lawful successors in the male line”.

Is it to be a case of “indirect rule a la Chinese” in the post-colonial situation of the New Territories? Is there to be a new Chinese national retention of the old British colonial retention of the so-called “Chinese tradition” in the New Territories of Hong Kong? “Indigenous inhabitants”, a social category of which by definition should only exist vis-à-vis the rise of foreign rule, currently continues to exist under the original national regime. Has it further become a betrayal of people, not just a matter of “revolution postponed” as Margery Wolf (1985) questioned? In terms of the original political mission that the Chinese socialist regime claimed, is this the liberation of the whole Chinese nation from the old China? I cannot help but ask these questions and wonder about their answers. However, there is one obvious point and that is that the notion of “Chinese tradition” not only continues to be a key concept in the socio-political governance of the New Territories, but also obtains a new official recognition at constitutional level from the current post-colonial Chinese government of Hong Kong. Under this post-colonial re-invention of the colonial rule around the notion of “Chinese tradition”, the current Chinese government by and large confirms the

differences between the village communities in the New Territories and the rest of Hong Kong, on the same basis as the ex-colonial rule.

III: The importance of community during post-colonial era

Many post-colonial writers such as Frantz Fanon (1986) and Albert Memmi (1965) are fundamentally pessimistic when they attempt to look for the possible transcendence of Western colonialism in order to reach a substantial sense of decolonisation in their own countries. In a similar vein, local post-colonial Chinese researchers in Hong Kong, too, have already sentimentally put forward a totally hopeless view as follows:

“The dream for decolonisation has fundamentally broken down. We are all alerted to the fact that colonialism did not come just from foreign powers, but also the central government’s domination and control over the local regions within the very same country as much as the practice of colonialism even with amplifications of them into an extreme fashion.”
(Luk, 1998, p.8) [my translation of the original Chinese]

However, a post-colonial situation is a situation where the past is the present and the present is the past. (Nady, 1989) This also makes me believe that the current post-colonial re-invention of the apparently successful ruling model from the ex-colonial rule in Hong Kong will in the end be, in fact, unsuccessful. My discussion

of the struggles of people, their sensitive reflections upon the prevailing patriarchal order, their various engagements with the dominant political rule, their individual or collective actions to create room for manoeuvre and their speaking out in history with consequential impact, will surely continue. The post-colonial situation of Hong Kong will be equally full of remarkable stories and people's numerous interplays with different hegemonic forces at different levels. In short, thanks to this little village of An He, I can appreciate the point that the great value of a specific human community does not necessarily lie in its important members of the present and the past. On the contrary, it can be equally argued that of equal importance are the considerably numerous real and hard human efforts and dynamics in the creation of significant social changes occasioned even with some successes. The possibility for *post*-colonial situation in term of its deeper sense that is 'going beyond' is ever here and now on the ground.

Appendix I: Glossaries

All transliteration of Chinese terms is by the *pinyin* system of Mandarin except for those are already conventionally romanised and known through the phonetic system of Cantonese which are specified with C.P. in the following lists.

Conceptual terms:

Chuan Tong	傳統
Fu Quan	父權

Historical terms:

Gong Sheng	貢生
Ming Dynasty	明朝
Northern Song Dynasty	北宋
Qing Dynasty	清朝
Song Dynasty	宋朝
The Law of Great Qing	大清律例

Local geographic terms:

An He Village	安和村
Fu Mei Au Sheung	鳳尾凹鄉
Fu Mei Au	鳳尾凹
Kam Tin (C.P.)	錦田
Kwai Tsing (C.P.)	葵青
Sai Kung (C. P.)	西貢
Shang Tusen (C.P.)	上村
Sheung	鄉
Tai Po (C.P.)	大埔
Yuen Long (C.P.)	元朗

Characters:

A-fen	阿芬
A-Jin	阿嬌
A-xin	阿信
Bo Zhong Liang	伯忠娘
Christina Loh	陸恭蕙
Deng A-mei	鄧阿妹

Deng Ba-fang	鄧八方
Deng Bao-cai	鄧寶財
Deng Bao-fu	鄧寶富
Deng Chang-hu	鄧昌戶
Deng Chun-li	鄧純麗
Deng De-ming	鄧德明
Deng Fei-yang	鄧飛揚
Deng Gan-lin	鄧甘霖
Deng Guang-hua	鄧光華
Deng Gui-dao	鄧貴道
Deng Gui-ren	鄧貴仁
Deng Gui-yi	鄧貴義
Deng Han-jie	鄧漢傑
Deng Li-cheng	鄧麗嫦
Deng Qing-cong	鄧青松
Deng Ri-xin	鄧日新
Deng Tuo-cheng	鄧拓城
Deng Xing-xing	鄧信興
Deng Yin-fu	鄧因福
Guo-ci	狗仔
Huang Hong-fa	黃宏發
Huang Jie-ying	黃潔盈
Liang San-jie	梁三姐
Liao Jin-zhi	廖金枝
Liao Yin-di	廖引娣
Lin Yue-e	林月娥
Ma Yue-rong	馬悅容
Ming-Jin	明嬌
Quan Dai-jin	關帶金
Uncle Xiang	祥叔
Wei-ming	偉明
Yu-jiao	玉嬌
Zhang A-rao	張阿嬌
Zhang Jun-shang	張俊生
Zheng A-xue	鄭阿雪
Zhou Shao-fen	周少芬

Clan, kin and family terms:

Biao Xiongdisimei	表兄弟姊妹
Big Tai Gong	大太公
Child-bride	童養媳
Da Jin	大妗
Dengs	鄧氏
Fang	房
Fu Mei Au Tai Gong	鳳尾凹太公
Guo Ji	過繼
Hous	侯氏
Hu	戶
Hu Kou	戶口
Jia	家
Liang Guang Tang	亮光堂
Liaos	廖氏
Married-out-daughter	外嫁女
Mu De Tang	穆德堂
Pengs	彭氏
Ri An Tang	日安堂
Tai Gong	太公
Tang	堂
Tang Xiongdisimei	堂兄弟姊妹
The Four Families	四家頭
Wei Zu Fu	外祖父
Wei Zu Mu	外祖母
Wens	文氏
Zhen Hong Tang	振鴻堂
Zhu Hu	住戶
Zu	祖
Zu Fu	祖父
Zu Mu	祖母

Local idioms:

Bequeathing property to male heir.	傳男不傳女
Hong Mao Gui.	紅毛鬼
Only sitting and eating must one day use up the material even it is as huge as a mountain.	坐吃山空

Piao Lai Chai.
Tai Gong gives us pork.
The married-out-daughter is equal
to the thrown-out-water.
Xi Xue Qian Chi.

漂來柴
太公分豬肉
嫁出去的女是撥出去的水

洗雪前恥

Organizational and institutional terms:

Ding Quan
Fu Mu Kuan
Heung Yee Kuk (C.P.)
Si Li
Tain Hou Temple
Tu Di Temple
Xin Jie Nong Gong Shang Yan Jiu Zong Hui
Xun Ding

丁權
父母官
鄉議局
司理
天后宮
土地廟
新界農工商研究總會
巡丁

Other:

Fung Shui (C.P.)
Mei Ci
Wai Xing Ren
Zi Ji Ren

風水
妹仔
外姓人
自己人

Appendix II: Notes on measurements

1 Square Meter	=	3.3	Square Feet
1 Hectare	=	2.471	Acres
1 Hong Kong Dollar	=	0.083	Pound (usual rate)

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